

# The Peace Building In Lebanon



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Joint news supplement

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## Special Edition

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The supplement contains articles by writers, journalists, media professionals, researchers and artists from Lebanon and Syria; they cover the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon and the relations between Lebanese and Syrians, employing objective approaches that are free of hatred and misconceptions.



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## Germany ready to meet a generational challenge

Germany has taken in some 150,000 refugees from Syria since 2012, and it expects at least as many spouses and children to follow. The vast majority of Germans have embraced those who are fleeing from war, civil war or political oppression. Ordinary Germans have made private donations of food and clothing. Some have even offered accommodation in their homes for an intermediate period.

By and large, Germany welcomes refugees. Of course, we should not be naïve. We are at the beginning of a much larger task to integrate hundreds of thousands of people from different cultural and religious backgrounds for the duration of their stays in Germany. This will take much more than donations and empathy. It will require years and years of effort, good will and resources.

It is a great task, one for a generation, yet it is one we can handle, and we should therefore approach it with a good measure of confidence. At the same time, Germany has made it clear that the burden must be shared, not least among EU countries.

The media plays an extremely important role to support this positive outcome. It influences attitudes through speech and framing, and it can foster understanding by explaining the underlying reasons for different perceptions. Honest and compassionate at the same time, a healthy and spirited press can diffuse conflicts and solve problems.

As new head of the German Embassy in Beirut, let me congratulate UNDP on its important effort to provide a comprehensive and balanced coverage of the enormous challenges that face Lebanon today. I would also like to thank the government of Lebanon and the Lebanese people for their generosity and humanity towards the 1.5 million refugees that this small country hosts.

**Ambassador Martin Huth**  
Chargé d'affaires of Germany

## Highlighting positive stories

What if positive stories about Syrian refugees in Lebanon were constantly reported? What if we were to highlight the positive and not only the negative impact of the refugee crisis on the host countries? What if we could redress the balance and shed some light on stories of cooperation, generous friendships, and ongoing dialogues with refugees in Lebanon? What if we could write about small-scale initiatives, interventions, and joint activities between Lebanese and Syrians that often go unnoticed or uncovered by the media? I believe that these questions, if answered, can offer a new perspective on the presence of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In this issue of the supplement, as in previous ones, Lebanese and Syrian writers, human rights activists, artists and journalists discuss topics related to displaced Syrians and the communities that host them. They pay particular attention to the emotional, humanitarian, cultural and artistic dimensions of the situation, which shape what we see and hear in Lebanon; they examine mutual stereotyping, discrimination and cooperation.

In fact, this supplement is a tool for change. It is an «Agora» or meeting-place, for highlighting peaceful, nonviolent and non-discriminatory approaches to community-building with displaced persons. By doing our best to show a few of the many positive stories and initiatives, we realize how much we need, now more than ever, a way of looking at the world that taps the potential in all of us.

Lebanon has shouldered the burden of the Syrian crisis for several years and is showing the world how to remain resilient and relatively stable. It has stumbled, too, but we can all learn from those missteps. During this festive season, I invite you to look around your own community for positive stories of resilience, sharing and compassion. And I invite you to be part of this effort to foster a peaceful, inclusive society, free of fear and violence.

**Luca Renda**  
UNDP Country Director

## Balanced management

It's interesting to note that the countries of the European Union, after initially talking about «humanitarian solidarity», have adopted the security approach in confronting the flow of refugees. They have done so by using a type of border monitoring over which they would scold Lebanon in the past. It's easy to recall that some of these countries and a number of NGOs offered a cool welcome to the Lebanese government's decision to regulate the wave of migration over the border with stricter measures, when the number of people leaving topped one million in a country of four million people. Meanwhile, the Schengen visa today is but a memory. The countries of the EU, with its free movement of goods and people, intend to establish serious modifications to EU treaties because of the gaps along the external borders of Europe amid the expected flow of refugees.

In all societies that suffer from a lack of security and large-scale socio-economic unrest, two contradictory types of extremism are likely to emerge. The first believes that terrorists have certainly infiltrated the migrant communities, and thus there should be stepped-up tough measures that practically stir up fear. The second is excessively «angelic» – it holds that Europe is answering a divine request to integrate all of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The two stances are equally dangerous, and equally simplistic. First of all, if there's a possibility that a wave of migration has made it easier for extremists to move around, police investigations have shown that most perpetrators of terrorism were born in the European countries that received them, where they lived and worked, and this is especially true of France and Belgium.

Thus, it is delusional to believe that Europe can host the peoples of three continents in the name of solidarity and participation. The French, Germans, Belgians and Greeks can't simultaneously make more efforts for the refugees while complaining afterward about being forced to share the costs.

A big heart, and humanitarian spirit, with a dose of security: these are the conditions for a balanced management of the refugee issue.

**Gaby Nasr**  
Managing Editor  
L'Orient-Le Jour supplements

## Here's for a different festive season

*«As you go home, your own home, think of others; don't forget those who live in tents.*

*As you sleep and count the planets, think of others; there are people who have no place to sleep»*

**Mahmoud Darwish**

It's that time of year again. The holiday season is upon us and for many Lebanese that means indulging in excesses: excesses in food, drinking and partying, either at home or abroad. Gifts will fly off the shelves and a feel-good factor will prevail for a few days.

The festive season offers many a respite from the misery surrounding them – especially in a country where there are a few things to be cheerful about. But it also keeps people from getting in touch with their better nature.

The Syrian refugee crisis has touched everyone: It has left Lebanon with severe economic and social problems, while the financial aid geared to help the country cope with burden of hosting nearly 1.5 million Syrian refugee, though welcomed, has so far fallen short.

It goes without saying that the international community needs to do more, but so too must local NGOs and even ordinary Lebanese. More must be done for these refugees, who are here not by choice, because they deserve to live with dignity until the time when they can return to their country.

As the cold and wet winter starts to bite, let the season of giving really bring out the best in all of us. Let's forego some of the excesses and instead start donating more for the refugees. Cash is king, but no less welcome are material donations such as warm clothes, blankets and toys. And if that can't be spared, even a kind word, a sincere prayer or a warm thought towards the refugees could make a difference.

Let's try and spread the joy this Christmas.

**Nadim Ladki**  
Editor in Chief  
The Daily Star

## The poor against the poor

It goes without saying that we are not thrilled with the sheer number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon; we have a bad experience with the Palestinian refugee crisis that started off as temporary and became permanent. This reflects negatively on the two peoples, on the relationship between them and on the overall conditions in Lebanon.

And away from the relation with the Syrian regime or the opinion regarding it, we are well aware that the refugees are oppressed people who have fled the hell they faced in their country to any country they were able to reach, be it Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon, all the way to Europe; more often than not through the boats of death.

Lebanon's problem is not with the Syrians as individuals, especially that there are kinship relationships among many families in both countries, as well as a historic interaction between them. The problem lies in the international community's abandonment of everyone, Lebanese and Syrians alike; the aids offered for the refugees are not sufficient and are scarce for the host communities, making the act of securing the necessary for the immigrants impractical unless through conflicts of interests and businesses. This means «stealing» the income of the Lebanese from their way and the way of their children; this puts the poor against the poor and thus resentment grows and with it the crisis deepens.

With such reading, some Syrians might understand why the Lebanese do not accept this reality, particularly in those areas and villages that have been surfeited with refugees, rendering their infrastructures unable to provide the services for which they were built. Add to that, the necessary services are not available for the Lebanese, above all water and electricity; how could they possible rejoice the sharing of these scant quantities with others?!

The international community has got to move at a much faster and more efficient pace so as to spare the two peoples the bitterness of war and to protect Europe and the entire world from the invasion of the hordes of refugees coming from all directions.

**Ghassan Hajjar**  
Editor in Chief  
An-Nahar newspaper

## #IamSyria!

I am Syria! I am the abandoned Arab, stuck in a labyrinth of the over-consumed labels, stereotypes, hatred and the constant blame of the «other» for whatever happens on this land.

I am Syria! I start where the waters of the Pacific end, run down, lost, miserable, impotent, idle, unable to move, or act, endlessly submissive to «Destiny», unable to be, all the way through the beaches of the Indian Ocean. I am Syria! Who is Arab but I? I am Syria; I come from Iraq, from Palestine, from Djibouti, from the camps of misery in Lebanon, from the all the alleys of misery in the Arab land.

I am Syria! I am the refugee of the new camps of the world, and its new terrorists.

I am but groups of women and children who wander miserably across the streets of Beirut. I am the middle-aged men who pile their children, their money, their goods and what is left of their living flesh in cheap boats, sailing towards uncertainty - drowning in the Mediterranean or drowning in humiliation at the borders of Western countries. I am lumps of people, colorless, nameless, without any past or future, with no present or stories to tell. I am the planet's «new terrorists», banned from its Paradise.

I am terrorism and I am its victims.

I am pro-regime, I am anti-regime. I am caught up in a byzantine debate over cause and effect as my children disappear in a sea of blood. I am innocent, the victim of the «game of nations.», while my finger is on the trigger, firing at the faces of those whose names and souls I wiped.

I am the barefoot of the cities, roaming down dead ended streets, bewildered, like orphans. Do not forgive those who rendered me homeless, for they know what they are doing. And Father, do not forgive me, for I did not stand up to my oppressors.

I am Syria! I am the pleasant, jasmine-lined streets that were hit by fire. A fire that won't stop spreading until it reaches the four corners of the earth.

**Hanady Salman**  
Managing Editor  
As-Safir newspaper

# How I lived 30 years ago

## A displaced child who passed through Lebanon

Nasri Sayegh\*

**My birth was a unique one. My «father» attacked my mother. He raped her, then kicked her out. My «father» was the head of a clan in northern Syria. The women and young girls of the tribe were available to him; a vile tradition to which the clan's members were subjected. My birth was a unique one. My mother fled in order to deal with the shame. She felt the contractions and withdrew to an uninhabited part of the Syrian steppe, preparing for the imminent birth. A sharpened stone to cut the umbilical cord – this is how my uncle told the tale of my coming into this world. «She clasped you to her chest and breastfed you with tears in her eyes,» he said. «She would cry, and smile.» Over the course of her lifetime, it was a language in which my mother became fluent.**

From shame I was born; from rape I was conceived. Perhaps my name, Nader (which means rare), matches the way that I was brought into the world.

When my mother returned to her family she hid me with her brother, who had accompanied her on her secret journey of shame. My uncle made up a story to protect me from the young boys and the gossip of the men and women. «He's an orphan we're bringing up,» he would say, about my upbringing. Early on, he sent me what resembled a school. I learnt with passion. I liked the letters and numbers. To me, letters were paradise and number a world of puzzles. I lived, played and grew up among these letters and numbers. My uncle discovered my love of books; he would see me practice dictation and engage in creative writing, copying the text of the books.

I grew older. Before others, my mother treated me like an orphan, but once alone, she would cry, and laugh. She would hold me to her and play with me like a toy.

I grew even older. I became a young man. I remember that I would try to listen to the radio stations I could pick up, and read pamphlets. For me, my country was a substitute for my father. I would sing the anthem «Syria my beloved» as if I had written it.

All of a sudden, the Arab Spring was born. It had a natural birth, like that of children – from a womb, after a period of labor. It was first born in Tunisia, and I was happy. The virus spread to Cairo. I was happy, and I joined the phenomenon; I wished that it would come to Damascus. The Arab Spring reached us, and it was a disaster. It was a dark, bestial and desolate spring. In northern Syria it emerged as something dark; it resembled the embers after a fire. It was no longer possible to live there. Death was everywhere, a daily visitor to villages, towns, streets and alleyways. Killing took place, by amateurs who were holding rifles. These weapons – in opposition to each other, and changing hands – killed the «spring.» It died and everything became meaningless, except survival, for a few grim days. The people with the weapons were merciless and were similar in the way they killed.

Like the Bedouins, there was little trace of us, and like the light, we began to disappear from where we lived. We survived time after time but on one occasion, the shrapnel from a rocket was the lot of my mother and it was my lot to bury her with my own hands. I refrained from placing any tombstone; may she remain an unknown victim forever. It is my right to retain her in my heart, and so it was. Wherever I was and wherever I might be, my mother Amneh remained with me in my heart, protecting me.

One day, my uncle introduced me to an influential person. «He can get you to Lebanon,» my uncle said. «I can't, and I will remain here.» The «person» was an armed man who led an armed group of young men and boys. I didn't pay much attention to his personal traits. His manner of cursing and feigning bravery didn't interest me. «Don't worry, he's the wildest of all the smugglers,» my uncle would say, and then put money in my pocket, along with a letter. He asked me to read it after I crossed the Lebanese border.

I slipped into Lebanon. At a dirt crossroad leading to Masnaa, I opened the envelope and read the following: «The man who got you into Lebanon is your father.» Everything became blurry, and I felt like vomiting. I wanted to go back. I didn't know what to say. I would forget that I existed every time I moved away from the border. The men and women in the convoy were moving cautiously, fearful of being caught by the police, who would return us to where

we came from. At dawn, we arrived at a dirt road that ended in the refugee camp.

This was the alternative for my homeland; I became a citizen in a country of tents, with no territory, flag, or people who know you.

What can I say about my stay in Lebanon? I remember the bitterness of being displaced, and the burden of being here. We became numbers. We'd wake up to a new count, and go to bed with a new accusation made against us. I had known mud in my childhood. I knew about sleeping in the open, because we were poor and on the run. I knew the small discomforts that would end with my mother's hug, and my sleeping in her lap. I could put up with all of that. But being poor in your own homeland isn't a curse. The curse is being poor when you're not in your own country. Lebanon has received people, but part of it has us like rubble.

After the shock of the first few days, I realized that being away from Syria would be very difficult. Obtaining the status of refugee requires you to take part in the game: register with the UN, and then wait, and wait. After this, a refugee card comes, along with humiliation. It's an alternative to your national ID, your country, and your land. You become completely unknown. Your name is your number, and it's connected with what comes before it, and who comes after it. However, my misfortune lay in becoming a burden on the UN. I thought that the daily torture and constant threats to receiving food and shelter every day would stop. I became an international citizen, but I didn't feel comfortable. I would eat by chance, and sleep irregularly, wherever or however I could. I would walk and my steps would guide me to places I would happen upon, in order to find work – any kind of work. But I would not beg. I went hungry on many occasions. I came down with a severe cold. The cold nights were long and the days of extremely high temperature burned me. Like others, I was born an adult, a plaything of the seasons, suffering from the mud and the dust. I looked forward to our daily bread, and rarely managed to obtain it. I would periodically think about returning. I quailed. Living without a father isn't a catastrophe. Then, the «humanitarian» assistance became more regular. I hate pity. They were engaging us in pity. The humiliation was renewed; you stand in a long queue to receive your share, or a doctor's check-up, hurriedly performed. I still remember what the men, the mukhtars and the municipalities did for us – they gave us much. But their «much» wasn't enough. Our numbers never stopped growing. We were hundreds, then hundreds of hundreds; then, the numbers couldn't be stopped. We became too numerous for the charitable associations and the assistance provided by villages and municipalities.

I said, I'd look for work, and I found many jobs. I was embarrassed by free meals. I was bold and brave enough to work, to do anything. I don't like to talk about the jobs I did, for a few Lebanese Pounds. I worked at a gas station. I washed, and I cleaned. I fixed tires. I was a mover, a seasonal laborer. I worked in the fields, and in the cafés. At least I would fill my stomach with bread won by my own effort. When I got a steady job, I once again missed books – or any pamphlet or letter. One time, a man saw me in front of a gasoline station. I was reading, and he noticed this. «Boy,» he said, addressing me. «I have a name,» I said. «It's Nader.» After calling me by my name he asked if I liked to read. I nodded, and he asked me to approach him. I walked behind him into a large orchard, far from the town. In the middle of

the orchard was a house with a brick roof.

He fed me and clothed me, and I took heart when he said, «Sleep here, in a room under the stairs close to where the flowers and the vegetables grow.»

This man – Mr. Nassar – was peculiar. When he would summon me for a discussion, or to ask me something, he would be silent, then clear his throat, then become silent again. He would only speak comfortably when asking me about the book I was reading. Once, he asked me to tell him about what I was reading. I wasn't good at it, and I stuttered. He said fine, and told me to leave. He didn't ask me about my family. He never asked me who I was. He considered me a young man from his town.

He was neither generous nor stingy – he was moderate in everything. I would work in the orchard when he would ask me to; then I did so without being asked to. I would only eat when he offered me something. Then, I began to prepare my own food, and would invite him to the feast. There was some kind of a father-son relationship at play.

Two weeks later, he asked me to choose between going to school and working in the orchard. I tried to be clever, and said I would work there after going to school. And that's how it was. At the end of the school year the French mission conducted an examination and I won first place. Mr. Nassar was pleased, and said, «Get ready to go abroad. I want you to continue your learning.»

What can I say about him? I discovered that he was a retired writer and a bachelor. He preferred loneliness to a family and lived off his pension and a bit of income from the orchard. Was he like a father to me? No. He wanted me to remain distant from him. When I read his books, I crossed the distance that separated me from him. I dealt with him like a friend, albeit with a large age difference between us. Friendship is finer than a father-son relationship.

When I recall him, my imagination gives me only bits and pieces of my own past, but a feast from the time that I spent with Mr. Nassar. Because of him, I forgave the racism of some Lebanese. Their media at times would insult an entire people and their civilization, although most people weren't like this. Those who exploited us as cheap labor caused a great deal of harm to us Syrians. The harsh bosses and our displacement were unjust to us, as we took over low-paid Lebanese jobs. They turned the poor against each other. A racist, right-wing dirty game.

Mr. Nassar got me a scholarship to France. His relationship with the French was a civilized one. In France, I learned and excelled. I traded letters for numbers and received passing marks in my specialized course of study. After some years I became one of the most talented people in the telecommunications field; I now have a program production firm. I take part in international exhibitions and I'm a guest on tv shows after I visit a ruler or president.

Mr. Nassar is still alive. He has remained with me after he had left this world. There are photos of him displayed prominently in the offices of my large establishment. Whenever a friend visits, I tell him the story that I'm writing now.

Thank you Lebanon, and forgive us if we have given offense, for we forgive those who have given offense. The greatest thing that I lack in life is belonging to a country that has experienced savagery because of religion, politics, ethnicity and sect. Will I go back to my country? Of course, and through Lebanon.

\* Lebanese writer and journalist

# Leaving politics behind

Sahar Mandour\*

**In Syria, dozens, then hundreds, and thousands of people left their homes to demand the fall of the ruling regime. Some five years later, millions of people are leaving Syria for the world, asking first of all for protection - from violence, and from death.**

The first «leaving» marked the first political moment in which the masses took part, as demonstrators. Syrians were acting, after decades of rule by a group that banned politics from the public sphere. The second «leaving» is now seeing politics return to closed rooms in other countries that oversee the «event» taking place in Syria. People left their homes to engage in politics, but they have gone back to being passive recipients; they were deprived of their political maturity after glimpsing a fleeting mirage of actually obtaining this long-sought goal. They were then placed in a situation of extreme hardship, to the point that they required salvation.

Comparisons should not be made between the Lebanese Civil War and the conflict raging in Syria today. On most levels such comparisons aren't valid because of the differences in the two contexts. But there are some things to be said, if we return to the pent-up memories of the war: shelters, checkpoints, certain images, certain types of relationships. However, in the experiences of the 1980s and 1990s, the image wasn't prevalent. There was no «breaking news,» or live broadcasts on television. What we «saw» we would in fact hear, often through friends and acquaintances. And if the tale of an atrocity is told, doubt remains – perhaps it was imagination, or a lie. Today, the situation has changed. Nevertheless, if we step back from the immediate weight of what is happening in Syria – the burden of crimes as they are committed – the war-related media outlets seem eliminative; they have allowed the details as well as for curtailing, manipulation and abundance. Corpses piled over each other, violence followed by more violence, and ISIS rose. The images have choked off everything else to the point where the location was eliminated from the image; either for not being much related to the context or for being too present to not be eliminated. Naturally, doing away with local voices is also due to other, non-media-related reasons, most prominently the political one. In the battle, silencing local voices is the winning card played by dictators, just as with a wide range of other players in the battle. This silencing of local voices goes along with politics leaving behind the public sphere, which recalls an earlier set of developments. After the Israeli invasion of Beirut and the resistance that forced the Israelis to withdraw, a series of mini-wars followed – the cease-fire for one conflict would be immediately overtaken by the eruption of another. For young people, family, school and the public space didn't talk politics. They spoke at length about assistance, efforts, victims, and incidents – the daily details. It wasn't that becoming accustomed to the situation was so much desired as it was inevitable. People in Beirut experienced the Civil War and we also saw them experience the violence in Iraq, the «black decade» in Algeria, and Syria today – rapidly-spreading ugliness and sharp, extremely bloody

escalation. These images, whose political content has been silenced, and thus along with it the depth of political responsibility, are labeled «humanitarian,» as if it's a biological or scientific definition of their victims. Something that is humanitarian requires relief, and it truly does.

Politics has left behind the public sphere; it had barely entered this domain in Syria. In terms of the authorities, «serious» negotiation has begun: Moscow, Vienna, Geneva and who knows which city will hold a «Taif» conference in the future. In terms of the people, no independent political deal is on the horizon. Arriving at the end of Lebanon's Civil War was beyond the power of that country's people – they were unable to

demand the change in their bloody leaders, who imposed themselves on the public sphere. The people were unable to avoid the «fate» of figures now wearing civilian clothes, and some did not want to even move in this direction. In fact, no other leaders were even in the picture. Some people lived, and others died; the post-war reconciliation came for communities that repressed their feelings toward such a development, and did not truly experience the reconciliation process. Such a reaction is possible when the community in question is barely alive in the first place. Countries that move to a period of humanitarian relief in their political life are ones that have experienced a great deal of death and many difficulties.

Relief efforts are being demanded throughout the world. Some Syrian activists here and in Europe rejected these calls, in order to strip humanitarian assistance of its political dimension. It was tantamount to robbing the victim of his or her political voice. In the media and at seminars, they criticized the related politics-free videos, which tried to help the citizens of Europe understand the situation. International organizations such as Save the Children made the videos; such criticism held a bit of luxury that was beyond those bestowed in hardships. Relief efforts should avoid such problematic questions, in order to mobilize the public to provide support. Separating between the humanitarian and political dimensions is problematic on several levels. But abandoning the humanitarian side for the sake of politics is a luxury these days. In addition, silencing politics in the public sphere is not only something imposed from above, it's also a result of the «on the ground» situation of this public sphere. Over the last five years, amid the violence of war, no political rhetoric has arisen to coherently offer people a different reading of the situation. Likewise, there has been no self-critical political movement that remains aware of its situation. Politics hasn't been a fertile ground, and it was relatively easy to prevent it from developing. Political rhetoric outside the international corridors of power has remained divided between two players. The war's bloody events either prove the criminality of the regime, or affirm the corruption of the uprising. This dichotomy has destroyed every news item, tragedy, political stance, rocket that is fired, or barrel bomb that is dropped – they're all used as examples of the correctness of one's position – a definitive correctness. It's a political dichotomy that is produced merely for consumption; it produces and reproduces only itself. The humanitarian aspect wins out, but free of politics, as the daily misfortunes become fuel for the situation of political polarization. Hope is lost, as one merely hopes to remain alive, and reach home – confronting such a state of affairs would be insane. Leaving behind the political dimension for the humanitarian one marks a move between two spaces that Syrians have not truly been accustomed to in modern times. For decades, people in Syria were banned – by force, naturally – from the political sphere. But in return they received benefits to keep them tame; most important here might be the protection from being obliged to demand humanitarian relief. The thinking was that «we won't be Lebanon, or Iraq» – this was the reward for leaving politics behind. Remaining alive used to constitute the «reward» for leaving politics behind, while today it constitutes the condition for regaining life.



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\* Novelist and editor of «Palestine», the monthly supplement in «As-safir» newspaper

# Civil society organizations and building bridges

Rabie Barakat \*

The Lebanese state might be too weak to present a mature approach on how to deal with Syrian refugees in comparison to other states; one that could reduce the humanitarian and socio-economic repercussions of the crisis and encourage the use of the refugees' own comparative advantages and that could serve Syrians and Lebanese alike. The Lebanese collective memory suffers from gaps that haven't been adequately dealt with since the end of the Civil War. The country also suffers from its current political polarization, which will likely continue in the near future. This polarization prevents it from containing the massive challenge posed by the displacement of more than 1 million Syrians. Thus, it might only be reasonable to expect such a deficiency in the management of the refugee crisis, especially if measured against countries with much greater material and human resources and more resilient bureaucracies. Despite these factors, these countries are also stumbling as they deal with the refugees; this is the case in some European countries lately as well as in the Middle East both prior to and after this development in Europe.

The vacuum resulting from the Lebanese state's dysfunctions as well as other exogenous factors, has allowed many civil society organizations to intervene in various domains that are connected to refugee affairs. It has allowed them to expand the margins of relief and legal work in this regard, and has given them an additional impetus to establish bonds between the host and guest communities despite the local and regional political and security conditions that do not help in bridging social rifts.

Official Lebanese bodies have dealt with some of the problems affecting refugees after having been absent from this domain, and amid meager external financial support and poor local planning and management. In the education sector, for example, and at the beginning of this last school year, registration in Lebanese public schools up to grade nine became free for both Lebanese and Syrians (previously it included annual fees and other expenses). This allowed the number of registered Syrians in the 3 to 14 age group to increase to some 200,000 refugees, after it stood at 106,000 the previous year. However, an initiative of this sort, like many other government initiatives, still fails to incorporate productive Syrians into the field of education – Syrian instructors in this case (the profession is limited to Lebanese). In any case, prior to this initiative by the Culture and Higher Education Ministries in Lebanon in coordination with the UNHCR and UNICEF, and more than four years after the crisis in Syria erupted, a number of civil society groups had made huge efforts to bridge the gap as much as their capabilities allow. In this regard, for example, the Syrian group Jusur worked in cooperation with Lebanese schools (such as the Makassed Charitable Organization) to provide educational requirements for hundreds of refugees, before collaborating with leading international universities, including Cambridge, which offers an annual grant as part of this cooperation.

As for the field of defending the rights of refugee children, local NGOs have confronted various challenges – some related to the refugees' poor living conditions and others to restricting or conventional social norms. They have coordinated programs that create an encouraging environment for constructive interaction between Lebanese and Syrians, since both groups have the joint humanitarian concern of improving their conditions, and since the inhabitants of (the same geographical area often share the impact of a given problem). The Lebanese group Himaya undertook an initiative in this regard, providing social and psychological support to youngsters who are victims of violence. The support groups it created involve Syrian and Lebanese participants.

Other efforts in the health sector were undertaken by local associations. Of those were ones that comprised of programs that are meant to provide people's needs when it comes to water, sanitation and hygiene, from which both sides benefit. Amel Association is one which



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is active in this regard; in addition to educational and relief efforts, it sponsors water treatment projects in areas populated by Lebanese and Syrians.

Concomitantly, and as part of their efforts in the field of infrastructure rehabilitation, local groups such as Utopia conduct workshops with the participation of Syrians and Lebanese to improve the neighborhoods where they live and the roads that they use on daily basis (they also beautify areas that traditionally witness military clashes, such as Bab al-Tabbaneh in Tripoli). In terms of educational efforts, groups such as Tawasol, which focuses on capacity-building for Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians, is creating spaces for interaction amongst these three groups, as its name indicates. On the environmental level, some groups are concerned with waste management and recycling in areas populated by refugees, such as Arcenciel (an NGO registered in both Lebanon and France). Among the Lebanese groups that are also expanding their presence, Makhzoumi Foundation is prominent. In addition to its work in relief, health and development, it offers vocational training sessions for Lebanese and Syrians and thus graduates groups of both.

The above are just a sample of the local Lebanese NGOs that work in cooperation with international associations such as UNHCR, UNDP and UNICEF as well as European Union organizations and others sponsored by individual European countries, such as DFID (UK) and GIZ (Germany), and in parallel or in cooperation

with international NGOs such as Save the Children and Doctors without Borders... The importance of their role lies in their local identity. They address educational, health, environmental, developmental, social and psychological issues and help create bonds between Lebanese and Syrians. In this scope, one should bear in mind that, when working on protracted conflicts such as the Syrian one, UN agencies devote some of their resources and assistance to NGOs in order to help host communities and develop their capacities, in parallel to other relief and development work that targets the «guest» refugees.

Despite the considerable amount of criticism regarding the growth, mechanisms and financing of NGOs, which are thought to reduce state sovereignty (some of this criticism is valid, but the topic is beyond the scope of this article), these NGOs have become an indispensable tool for addressing humanitarian needs in today's constantly changing post-modern world. In Lebanon, in light of the malfunction of the state's bureaucracies and the untreated social problems over its ongoing crises, these organizations have very important roles to play. And perhaps their most profound impact on the medium and long terms lies in the projects that bring people together, despite the unhelpful conditions and tensions between the Lebanese host communities and their Syrian guests.

# «Syria in my mind» A journey to Syria's heritage

Tareq Awwad\*

The «Syria in my mind» project was conceived and executed by Biladi Association in cooperation with the Syrian Eyes team, managed by AVSI, and funded by UNICEF. It targeted 2,000 Syrian children between the age of 5 and 15, covering Nabatieh, Kham, Marjayoun and Sidon in South Lebanon, and Jounieh, north of Beirut.

This is Biladi's second project in Lebanon with Syrian refugees. The first, «Syria in my mind 1», was carried out on one day in each school. It was considered the world's first project on Syrian heritage with Syrian refugee children. The trainers were selected by the Syrian Eyes team; they underwent an intensive, two-week training course on teaching heritage, interacting with children, and education through games. They were trained by a team of people specialized in education, psychology, archaeology, history and heritage, and also received life-skills training.

The project involves a number of extracurricular educational activities. These are aimed at creating images of Syria, the mother country – free of war and destruction – in the mind of the youngsters. In addition, it aims at defining the youngsters' Syrian identity and boost their sense of national belonging by using heritage – one of the components of the identity of any people. As for Syrian refugee children in Lebanon, they fall into two categories: one doesn't know Syria at all, while the second has only memories of the country.

## Carrying out the activities

The project was carried out by creating a group of games that constituted, over four consecutive days, a journey to Syria's heritage. A large map of Syria was especially designed for these young people, based on their ages. They would sit on this map and became acquainted with its geography through the basic features of their country, such as mountains, rivers, plains and the steppe (badiya). They marked each category with a certain color and took trips between the cities they belong to, by pushing a small car over the map.

In addition, pictures of plants and animals indigenous to Syria were posted on the map, each in the appropriate region of the country. Six archeological sites were also identified ahead of time, so that the participants could become acquainted with during the four days.

The children have, for example, built a model of the Citadel of Aleppo and al-Husn castle, by using wooden blocks and cardboard foundations. They sat on two maps – one of Old Damascus and the other of Palmyra, and learned about the details of these two cities. They learned everything about the waterwheels of Hama from a wooden instructional model.

This information was reinforced through educational games that the youngsters participated in, such as Bingo, which contains pictures of Syrian archaeological sites, or hopscotch with pictures of the Syrian fauna.

We can't speak of Syria's heritage without mentioning the hakawati, dressed in his finest Damascene traditional clothing and roaming throughout all of Syria's provinces and its most beautiful locations, relying on two characters – karakoz and iwadh – whose stories are full of jokes and humor.

The difficulty facing this activity was the inability to see or visit the various locations; instead of a trip there was a ten-minute video that talked about Syria and its ruins, and some of the country's traditions.

Each day concluded with everyone's favorite activity, namely singing and dancing; the lyrics of songs with old-fashioned melodies were modified to better suit the program's objectives.

## Youngsters respond to the project and the objectives

Mohammad, a child from Aleppo, told one of the trainers: «When I go back to Aleppo I'm going to take a picture of myself at the Citadel and send it to you.»



© Ali El Sheikh



© Ali El Sheikh

After all of this preparation, there was considerable fear that the project would be tough on youngsters; in fact, the opposite was the case. They responded enthusiastically and repeated the songs ever since the first day. They were very happy and asked their parents about what they had heard about Syria, and whether everything that they were told – about Syria's ruins, the heritage and natural settings – was true.

One of the teachers from AVSI told us that «after the program ended, all of the examples from the lessons that the children talked about involved the Citadel of Aleppo, the waterwheels and other stories and information, which they received via the games and the maps.» «This was very positive for us,» the teacher added. «We tried to take advantage of this in educational terms and derive from the project ideas about Syria in order to enrich our lessons.» As another teacher put it, «the children came to introduce themselves based on the area they come from (in Syria), after they previously mentioned the name of the Lebanese village they were born in. In fact, they've become more

cognizant of the place to which they belong after it was obscure to them, and wracked by war.»

Meanwhile, the project had a huge impact on the trainers; they wanted to see it expand and they wanted to return to Syria one day and see children take part in it when the war ends.

At the end of the four days, some of the youngsters in each center would come to us and tell us that when they return to Syria they will visit Ugarit in Latakia or the Citadel of Aleppo, ride camels in Palmyra, or swim near the waterwheels of Hama. They have begun to think more about what distinguishes the apples of Damascus from those elsewhere. «The project had a big influence on my memory as a Lebanese,» said one of the supervisors from AVSI at its conclusion. «I ended up wanting to get to know Damascus, Aleppo and other Syrian cities. How can I imagine the extent of the project's impact on youngsters?»

\* Assistant project manager of «Syria in my mind» at the Biladi Association and founder of Syrian Eyes Team

# Like Soup Warms the Body

Sahar Charara\*

On a winter night in 2013, Barbara Abdeni Massaad was cold in her heated apartment in Beirut, and the idea of families sheltered in vulgar tents in the Bekaa with no heating kept her awake. At a loss for how to be of help, she decided to visit one camp in Zahle. There, every weekend, she would do what she knew how to do best: share food, and take photos.

The book is full of them: very colorful clichés of soup bowls and faces staring right across the glossy pages. But the eyes are not accusatory: children's eyes smile, and those of the women speak to you. Barbara finds that «the eyes of people break the barriers of hatred.» Details like nationality and religion, what part of Syria you come from and which side you take in the dragging war become irrelevant.

You see past the ragged condition of the campsite, through faces coarsened by recent experiences and emotions, and dire current living conditions: just people... humans. Their gaze, a dominant feature of the portraits, speaks of a rapport with the photographer, warms the pages, and the heart.

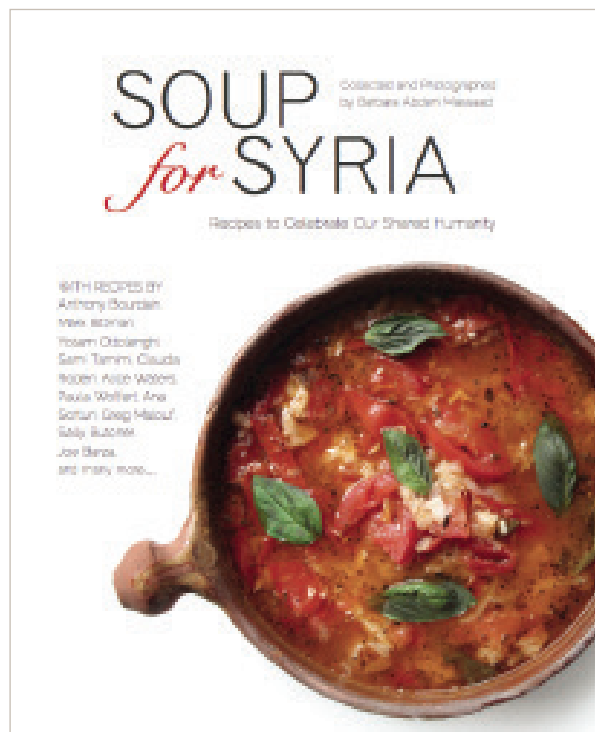
The book is an image of Barbara Massaad the person in hard-cover. Showcasing her two passions food and photography, it also reflects her generous humanist nature, and talent for reaching out to others with ease -and bonding.

## Generosity is no stranger to the food culture

Like any good deed should, the project went smooth. The choice of soup specifically is symbolic: it represents the ultimate dish of comfort, warmth, and resilience that is cooked for many and shared. So friends and fellow cooks were invited to send in their soup recipes to help refurbish a cookbook as well as sustain weekly culinary visits to the refugees' camps. While discussing her food relief efforts at a dinner party in London, Barbara showed a dummy of the book to Michel Moushabeck, who had previously published one of her cookbooks (Man'oushe, Inside the Street Corner Lebanese Bakery). He immediately sympathized: of Palestinian descent, his family had also fled his homeland to Lebanon then to the States because of the respective wars there. Soup for Syria started taking shape.

To optimize the project, both Interlink Publishing and Barbara contacted famous chefs worldwide from their respective networks, and more soup recipes poured in. Cooks and non-cook foodies shared the goodness of their culinary and gustative suggestions. Out of hundreds of recipes collected, only 80 made it to the 208-page book. «The criteria were ease and convenience,» says Massaad. During the selection phase, she hosted a team of ten people in her house, and together they took to preparing and proofing the brews, «the most fun part of the whole experience.» Among the contributors are prestigious names on the scene: famous food writers, critics, and activists (Mark Bittman, Anthony Bourdain, Sally Butcher, Greg Malouf, and Paula Wolfert), TV show personalities, famous restaurateurs and food bloggers, and a few food amateurs like the book's graphic designer Pascale Hares. On social media, contributors would tweet about their input, the cause it is helping promote and fund, and encourage sharing photos and accounts of tested recipes.

Sales of the book were promising even before the



© Barbara Abdeni Massaad



official book launch, and the publisher expects, according to Massaad, some 250 000 copies of it to be sold worldwide. The book launch fundraising event in Beirut featured several activities in addition to the signing: a photo exhibition, cookie sale and soup sampling in the presence of several contributors. Volunteers mobilized to donate the venue, the ingredients of the food sampling stations, and the cost of blowing-up posters and the photos exhibited. Other events and appearances are due for Soup for Syria in the coming couple of months: a book signing in Holland, another in Seoul for Asio Gusto, and a panel seat on the Table for Peace.

But those are not the only activities related to the book. The website of Soup for Syria (<http://www.soupforsyria.com/>) also encourages involvement through relevant and timely events like soups parties, small book-sale initiatives and suggestions, and features at other local events.

But most of all, it promotes buying the cookbooks directly through it to guarantee that 100 percent of the revenue will go to the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, to fund food relief efforts mainly, but also some medical cases that are not covered by the agency.

\*University professor

## Season of migration... to death

Darine El Helwe\*

**The scope of Lebanese migration to Europe, via the boats of death that carry people from Turkey to Greece, is expanding. The journey begins by crossing the borders of neighboring countries before finally reaching Germany, Denmark or Sweden.**

These countries have attracted Lebanese for years. People from North Lebanon were the first emigrants; the largest number of these were people for whom job opportunities had declined, as development in their regions came to a standstill. The state, meanwhile, was present with its soldiers and security plans, while the north has experienced no calm since the eruption of the crisis in Syria. A number of young men joined groups fighting in that country and embarked on journeys of jihad in several Syrian cities. Lebanon's security agencies began to monitor the movements of many young men. Nevertheless, this group of people is part of a situation that has not spread to all parts of the country.

The repercussions of several dozen rounds of fighting in Tripoli between gunmen from the neighborhoods of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen harmed the city's economy; it affected the economic role of Tripoli, which has experienced an unprecedented deterioration. Hundreds of establishments have closed their doors and the clashes have forced a number of merchants to relocate outside the city. The drop in commercial activity has paralyzed all of the economic sectors of the city and

surrounding areas, meaning the freezing of thousands) of job opportunities; unemployment has risen and the socio-economic crisis has become worse.

Young men in the north are being squeezed. All of their movements are being monitored and their cities' economies are struggling under the weight of paralysis affecting all of the surrounding regions. They have no options – and are facing despair with only the sea at their back; they have chosen the sea to take them to the shores of safety.

Their dreams are small, and modest; these young people have nevertheless become a burden on their city. They have packed their dreams and put them in their suitcases on their huge adventure, which might be their last. They have chased a dream of having a homeland that gives them names, and not numbers, one in which they do not become weapons in battles and ballot papers on election day.

Today, the city of Tripoli is hemorrhaging its young people, as part of a phenomenon that hasn't been witnessed seen since the end of the Civil War a quarter-century ago.

Thousands of them have left. They have chosen the sea

to search for a new land that does not feed them despair and deprivation from the time they are born. They regard themselves as dead in their own country, but dream that they will be reborn elsewhere, in a moment of folly, perhaps.

They dream of choosing the way they die. They don't want to be killed by a stray bullet, an explosion, or a battle with Jabal Mohsen, or in the battles of Syria, which have lured fighting groups there in the hundreds, as young men are recruited to serve in their ranks.

They dream of a petty job, to make enough money to eat what they want, instead of filling their mouths with potatoes and grains, the types of which their plates have come to know by heart.

They dream of making enough money to rescue them from having to rely on political parties, religious sects, and armed groups, which are funded by the local political leaders.

Tripoli's politicians are observing the spread of this phenomenon but they answer by saying «these people have no horizons in their cities; Lebanon won't exit its state of paralysis before the war in Syria ends... The Lebanese state's priority today is to preserve security





and stability, to avoid the spark of the next-door conflagration.»

Young people who have chosen to leave don't hide the fact that by seeking refuge in a European country, they're «taking from» the share of Syrians, who are fleeing death. They justify their entrance into this domain by pointing to the repercussions of Syrian migration to their region in terms of pressure on the economy and competition for jobs.

Most of them would obtain forged Syrian documents that are provided by the smugglers; this will grant them quick asylum in Europe and dispel the danger of being deported.

As the number of refugees rises, those responsible for organizing these trips are no longer hidden. The merchants who are a part of the mafias are growing in number and the phenomenon has expanded to Turkey; they go back and forth, negotiating with those who want to migrate in broad daylight. On the city's streets, the most exciting stories are those of the previous migrants, told by those who wish to join them.

In one neighborhood, Mustafa's mother finishes buying the things on her shopping list – what's required for her son's trip. She purchased new underwear and some wool sweaters in the old souks of Tripoli, out of fear that her son will be cold, after news of the weather arrives by phone and social media, which the migrants use to communicate with their families.

She has packed his suitcase herself. She hasn't forgotten to put in a few cans of food that she is convinced will save him from the hunger that might attack him while waiting to arrive in Germany. Umm Mustafa says with no hesitation that she worked hard to convince her son to go to Europe. She says that his being abroad won't cause her any pain. Instead, she is pained to see him as «a gunman who joins a group fighting in the Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen clashes.» She thanks

God that the battles have ended, but says that «in their wake, they've left behind a generation that lacks the opportunity to complete their education and build a future. Some of them have become martyrs; others were wounded. Most of them have begun to walk around Bab al-Tabbaneh's neighborhoods, smoking water pipes, and waiting for deliverance that never comes.»

She is well aware of the dangers that will accompany her son's trip to Turkey, and to Greece, before arriving in Germany, where hundreds of others from his neighborhood have already made it. But she is desperate and wants to save him from the failure that has become inevitable.

She is one of the mothers of the many young men who have left the city, fleeing its misery. They say that they are living without being alive, and that they have no future, and that for years they have been forgotten in their marginalized neighborhoods.

At the apartment of her relative, Umm Mohammad has been waiting for seven days for her son to reach Germany as well.

The 60-something woman sits in her home, behind the produce market in Bab al-Tabbaneh, and doesn't let the cell phone leave her hand. It's the lung through which she breathes – it's a new umbilical cord that ties her to her son, and brings her reassurance about him, via pictures, news and messages that he sends. These record his trail, from Turkey – which he left in a rubber boat – to Greece.

«He and his wife and four children suffered quite a bit when they went from one country to another,» she says, «He told me that they sometimes slept in the open air, in the cold. His little daughter, only six months old, suffered from lunch infections because of the weather.» Mohammad's voice is strained and the words voiced with difficulty in the last voice message received by his mother. She knows that he is crying as he tells her that

he is well, and that «the mujaddara that I grew tired from eating at home in Bab al-Tabbaneh is better than Europe and its paradise.» Mohammad didn't have a job to provide a steady income. He was crushed by debt and was no longer able to provide a living for his four daughters. The news from abroad about health and life insurance granted by European countries to refugees tempted him. He sold his home for about \$20,000, paid off his debts, and gave the rest of the money to the smuggler, who couldn't guarantee that he would get to his preferred destination.

Smugglers have become active throughout north Lebanon from Tripoli, to the Palestinian refugee camps and the villages of Akkar. They ask for \$2,500-3,000 per trip and pledge to get the migrant to Turkey by sea, from the port of Tripoli. The migrants reach Mersin in Turkey and then move to Izmir, where they meet, thanks to a middleman, the head of the smuggling network. Some stay in cheap hotels and some are kept on the road for a few days by the smugglers. No one can guarantee the time period that precedes the trip to Greece. It all depends on the signal that comes from the smuggler who remains unknown until the moment the rubber boat is boarded. Information from the field indicates that the people who run the smuggling networks are Turks, while the middlemen are Lebanese and Syrians. They are active in areas where their business is in demand – demand is higher than supply, so hundreds of people are camped out on the streets of Mersin. They won't go back, despite all of the hardship that the smugglers have placed them in. They cling to the opportunity that might not come another day. But the most dangerous part is their realization that they are purchasing hope from people who traffic in human souls.

*\*Journalist and reporter with Sky News in Lebanon*

## Lebanese women: the sea is not for us

Luna Safwan\*

**Traveling by sea – and the safe arrival of Syrian families to the shores of Greece – has proven to be a heavy burden for Lebanese women whose husbands and fathers have given them the choice of either traveling by sea in search of a better future, or waiting in Beirut. They have decided to stay.**

Kelly, 22, sat on her father's couch near the window that overlooks the sea in Ouzai. She watched a plane as it lands, and said «I hate this sea today, we used to sit in this modest room every day, all of us, eat, drink and laugh. But they decided to leave, and I decided to stay.» Mayez Safwan made up his mind the day he decided to go to Europe, thinking this would change the course of his life. He left Beirut this last October, along with 11 members of his family. They headed for Istanbul in order to take a bus to coastal Izmir. There, the boats were ready to take the migrants to the shores of Greece. But the winds countered the ship's desire, and the boat sank. Kelly and Mirna, the two oldest daughters, decided to stay in Beirut and avoid taking that type of risk that didn't suit them. The two talk about the reasons that led their father to take the difficult decision and to place his trust in the sea. «He was told that the trip would be easy,» Mirna says, «and that it would be easy to get from Istanbul to Izmir, and that the trip by boat would only be an hour; that the weather was good at this time of year. He was also told that the trip to Germany wasn't difficult, but our family didn't even make it to the shores of Greece.»

Kelly and Mirna's family was not the only Lebanese family living in Beirut to be encouraged by the stories being told by people around them to embark the gamble

of the sea. But the girls decided that this sea wasn't theirs. They wished their family well and awaited their safe arrival. However, that did not happen because the deal the family made was suspicious and not documented. The waves, meanwhile, were treacherous.

Elsewhere in the capital, Maya moves around as she packs things in a shop in Beirut. She looks at her phone from time to time and then goes back to checking the price list. She's a 35-year-old Lebanese woman who refused to leave Beirut with her husband, who decided to go to Germany months ago, also by sea. «It was a big risk,» she says, «and honestly I wasn't brave enough, although we don't have children yet and that would only make our movements and our trip easier. But I didn't want to drown.»

Maya bid her husband goodbye; he headed to Bordum in Turkey. From there he took a boat that got him safely to Greece. Six months later, he is still awaiting to move into a home that is separate from the camp that took him in for several months in Germany. She's waiting for the papers and the reunion visa to come, so that she can join her husband in Germany and start their new story there together. «We're Lebanese,» Maya says, «and I still have mixed feelings. I feel that by taking the trip we've prevented a Syrian family from its right to claim asylum, but I don't have a future here. Six hundred dollars a

month won't be enough if I have a baby. Today, I want to make a family, and I'm getting closer to 40 every hour. I wanted to leave but I left the risk-taking to my husband and told myself, 'If he gets there then great, and if he doesn't he will have chosen his destiny by himself.'»

Sarah (not her real name) moves between Beirut and Tripoli for her job. Her husband has also settled in Germany a year ago. She is a Lebanese from Tripoli and is also waiting for the family reunification visa for herself and her children – she refused to let them take the risk of traveling by sea. When Sarah read about the drowning of the Lebanese family of Mayez Safwan, and decided to delay her departure. «When I heard of what happened with that family, I called the office that is arranging a trip by sea for me and my two children. I told them that I'm not going. We gave our seats to someone else. I got scared of the idea of the boat sinking while I'm on it, with my children, alone. Who would I save first? My six-year-old son? Or my little daughter?»

«I'll wait for the family reunification visa, even if for a year, two or ten years – but I won't give the sea the opportunity to steal my children. My husband managed to get across these obstacles and won the challenge, it's true, but what guarantees that we will too?»

*\*Lebanese journalist*

# Syria's affluents also suffer from the war

Cherine Kabbani\*

**It's not only the poor who are suffering from the ongoing war in Syria, now in its fifth year. The wealthy people are also suffering, even if to lesser degrees. It's true that most of them haven't experienced displacement or sought asylum, living in tents out in the open, or waiting for assistance here and there. Thanks to the funds at their disposal, they've managed to purchase or rent a home in Lebanon, or even reserve a wing in a hotel. However, just like all Syrians have, they no longer enjoy stability; they've lost their peace of mind and seen their dreams and aspirations destroyed.**

Abu Khaled (a pseudonym) is dressed in a sweat suit and sits on a plastic chair in a café on Ain al-Mreisseh street in Beirut. Most of the patrons are elderly persons. He says that he loves to look at the sea because it makes him feel calm. It takes him on a journey of relaxation and reassurance. Few people know that he is related to the First Lady of Syria, Asmaa Assad. He chooses his words carefully when he is asked about the situation there, and about his stance on the «punch-up» between his countrymen, as he puts it.

Abu Khaled says that he made a fortune from trading in Syria's pharmaceuticals sector. He was known for his sales acumen, which allowed him to remarkably dominate a large portion of the market. Some people call him a monopolist and say his success is due to his close ties to the «Assad regime.» Abu Khaled answers this with a laugh, and says in his Syrian accent, «There is no more work – all that effort was wasted. How did the regime help me?»

In 2013 the war erupted and all of Abu Khaled's factories in Homs were destroyed. Everything that survived the bombing in these factories was stolen and looted. He was unable to make a living after that and discovered that being without a job and beginning over again, under the current circumstances, would be very difficult, particularly since the militias, as he calls them, seek revenge against everyone who doesn't belong to them or doesn't share their political inclinations and ideas.

## An opulent yet anxious home

Abu Khaled made his decision to leave Syria. He came to Lebanon because he feared for the lives of his children and he was determined to send them to Europe. He wanted a new future for his family, far away from the problems of the war and its difficult experiences. He entered Beirut legally and bought an opulent home in Ain al-Mreisseh, overlooking the sea, for more than \$1 million. He didn't bring any of his possessions or furniture with him from Syria and didn't enter the country as a refugee, but rather as a Syrian businessman, with millions of dollars in his bank account. This allowed him to obtain residency easily and is considered a «grade one» resident. He even says, mockingly, «I could buy the Lebanese passport if I wanted to, and easily too.»

Despite the easy move to Lebanon and his ability to obtain a luxurious home for his family, there were difficulties. He says, with sadness, that «money is but a means to obtain housing and meet the family's needs.» Abu Khaled says he misses safety; anxiety haunts him, especially after his oldest son went to Europe.

The son also experienced migration to Europe, fleeing the bloody war. The father explains that a friend advised him to send his son to Sweden via a travel agency, i.e. on a commercial vessel to Greece, for \$5,500. Traveling via a rowboat or rubber raft would be dangerous; he was no longer concerned with obtaining the money, but instead with protecting his children from the loss and destruction in Syria. «I lived for hours and days with fear. I didn't sleep until my son reached Greece. There, a friend took over and smuggled him into Sweden.»

## All are equal before the war

Abu Khaled believes that war doesn't distinguish between rich and poor. It leaves both afraid of the

unknown; with continuous anxiety. He affirms that one's wealth is worthless if they lose someone dear to them. Again, he repeats his famous slogan: «Money comes and goes, but death is treacherous.»

Abu Khaled's family lives in luxury. The mother's requests are always met. The dinner table is full of the finest foods. Abu Khaled's daughters frequent shopping centers and purchase the finest and most famous brands, to show off in front of their friends from Aleppo, whenever they go out for coffee or tea.

His daughter Sham doesn't care about the war. She says that she's fed up with the «hypocrisy and lying» that have come to dominate the lives of Syrians in her country. She doesn't care about politics either and wants to live in peace in a foreign country. She is waiting to be accepted to university, so that she can leave Lebanon.

Sham is a young woman in her early 20s and doesn't know how to kill time in Lebanon. She goes out in the mornings with her sister and mother to jog along the Manara corniche. She then enjoys a healthy breakfast, to maintain her figure. She spends the rest of the time either online or chatting with friends.

Sham avoids talking about the situation in her country. Her father has warned her about getting mixed up in things that he doesn't need, especially because «hatred towards Syrians in general and refugees in particular has increased because of the war and the resulting socio-economic pressures» on Lebanon. «When the misfortunes happen you find yourself alone,» she says, justifying her stance. «It's human nature to love yourself more than any other thing. All I hope is to see my family remain by my side; I don't want to experience feelings of want or asking strangers for help, like my countrymen did when they waited for pity from society, or the international community. Your rights are violated and your dignity gets trampled on.»

«Unfortunately, money brings respect,» she acknowledges, «and if it's lost so is your dignity.» Sham hasn't seen for herself what she's heard about bodies in the streets, murder and rape. This is because of «where I live in the capital, where life is normal. Syrians go to their work and carry on normally with their daily activities. The regime's soldiers control the situation and are on alert for any attack.»

Meanwhile, Hanin, Sham's sister, criticizes the luxurious life of some of her sister's friends in Lebanon. «Many people don't care about the desperate social situation,» Hanin says. «They aren't affected by the humanitarian issues that Syrian refugees are dealing with. Instead, they care about fashion and the latest fads. They spend their time at shopping centers to buy stuff, no matter their price; sometimes exceeding several hundred dollars.»

Unlike Sham, Hanin works with her father, who has entered the construction sector in Lebanon as partners with a friend. Hanin prefers to spend her time sitting behind a desk and managing her father's affairs instead of sitting in cafés and listening to «the silliness» of women and their «superficial» news, as she says.

Hanin does her best to help Syrians who work in her father's construction sites. «I'm so happy when I see a Syrian working to make a living for his children, and we'll always help them. I hope that the world changes its view of Syrians; they're not thieves, con men or rapists. We want to live in safety, that's all.»

## From gold to cotton

Abu Qusai's experience is different than Abu Khaled's. He lost all of the fortune he had made from the gold business, after he trusted someone and brought him in as a partner in his shop in Homs. Two months went by before he discovered that the friend he had trusted ended up betraying him and reaching an agreement with a number of people who belong, as Abu Qusai says, to one of the militias in Syria. They took him to an abandoned farm and forced him to sign papers turning over his business. They threatened to kill him and his children if he ever showed up in the area again.

Abu Qusai didn't think about money at the time. He asked God to save him from death – let all the money be lost. He sold his luxurious home in Latakia to an acquaintance, for a low price. He came to Lebanon and rented an apartment in Hamra for \$1,500 a month. He stayed there for six months before leaving to Turkey, where he bought a home for \$80,000. He opened a small shop for clothing and cotton goods. «People look down on Syrians whether they're rich or poor. Everyone has suffered from the harshness of the war,» he says. «Personally, I don't trust anyone anymore. I don't help people unless I know that they genuinely need help.» Abu Qusai also described the impact of the economic situation on class differences, saying: «When they say 'you,' meaning the rich, I laugh and say: 'The only difference between us is that we eat without waiting for anyone to feed us. But what's the good of food if it feels like a knife in the heart because of the war and the instability?»

«The war has done away with everyone's dreams,» he adds. «Homes became rubble. We've been displaced by the bombing, to save ourselves. Money might bring us a bit of safety but not peace of mind.»

## «The wartime affluents»

In contrast, Raed (a pseudonym), who's a middle-class residing in Lebanon, talks about a new class that has come to be known as the wartime affluent in Syria. They live on the misfortunes of others and «have no conscience,» as he puts it.

«This term applies to everyone who has economically benefited from wars,» he says. «They exploit people's need for basic goods. They monopolize them and sell them at high prices,» he continues, pointing out how many people have also benefited from «the spread of a black market economy, full of stolen goods and weapons of all types.»

«What bothers me most is my neighbor, who overnight turned into a big-time property owner; he bought the land at very high prices. Some say that he got his money through looted goods; the market for furniture stolen from homes, or taken by force, through thuggeries,» Raed says. He expresses surprise at the developments, «How can a person live off of others and strip them of their dignity? He should help them, at the least.» Raed says he pities anyone who merely contemplates his or her money, without caring to helping other people in need, or those who are screaming for a loaf of bread to keep their children from starving.

# «The trashes of some are resources for others»

Saeed Albatal

Years have passed since the siege by Syrian regime forces have been imposed on the rebellious Ghouta region outside Damascus, complicating the situation and raising unending questions for everyone there. No answers appear to be on the horizon. The questions don't involve the nature of the group that is laying siege to the region, nor the type of relationship with this group in Syria's future, nor the fierce air raids that residents feel have been continuous since ever. Instead, the questions involve simply the following: how to continue life under conditions that no one living in that country would have thought possible?

At the end of the summer, people in the Ghouta region of Damascus usually head for the outdoors and open spaces, to get a breath of fresh air in the golden wheat fields. As he sipped coffee made from barley, and not coffee beans, Abu Rateb told me there about his deep anxiety. A store in the city of Douma invented the blend after the price of 200 grams of coffee exceeded 1,000 Syrian Pounds.

I don't know Abu Rateb's original job. I met him for the first time after the armed factions of the opposition forced regime troops to leave Douma. At the time, he was responsible for unloading fuel trucks in the Ghouta, in cooperation with the local council, and moving the fuel to areas that were safe from bombing.

Afterward, we saw each other in a wheat field, by coincidence. He was limping, and he was now supervising a relatively large piece of land, in the Shaifounieh area, planting wheat. Perhaps he had moved between a number of jobs before settling on this one.

When plastic as an industrial source of fuel became commercially viable, Abu Rateb turned part of the land, in agreement with its owners who had become his partners, into a plastic factory.

The first person who engaged in this activity remains unknown; some believe it was pioneered in Gaza, by Palestinians. But Abu Rateb was the first of the Ghouta residents to benefit from the process, to make gas, and fill tanks with five hours' worth – for a price of several thousand Syrian Pounds. The price of a legal tank is SP 40,000... if you can find one.

The factory, which began with two barrels, now has a large plastic shredder, and six barrels working around the clock. There are eight employees, and a pick-up truck.

The plastic enters the factory in various sizes, and exits in the form of gas, gasoline, kerosene, diesel, and grease. The grease is mixed with cut-up wood and is dried into small sticks, called «smart wood.» It burns quickly and lasts a long time, and doesn't leave much charcoal behind.

Abu Rateb isn't a big fan of talking about numbers; he expressed his anxiety by summing up his situation as follows: He faces two choices; the easiest of the two is difficult. He must either reduce his use of the electricity current, or that of the water, so that he only fills his tank once a week. How can he do the latter when he requires huge amounts of water – for washing and bathing, and for washing the clothes diapers of his newborn son, Mahmoud?

Making it worse is that the large tank – one of three connected tanks – began to crack last night, after a nearby rocket strike that killed four people.

This led him to the notion of installing plastic tanks, which would boost his ability to store water, without having to fill up too often.

«It's not that easy,» I said.

The main problem is that the supply of plastic is always shrinking, although I don't tell people this, so that they don't get scared. In fact, there's almost no plastic left in the eastern Ghouta. The owners of the warehouses in the town of Arbain sold their last big amount of plastic last week and have now switched what's left to reserve, so it won't be sold – or they will wait until the price goes up.

«You know what?» Abu Rateb asks me, taking the first sip of that drink that he calls coffee, «Yesterday, when I was waiting in line to stop the private generator from pumping water, I saw heaven on television.»

I asked him what this heaven was.

«Heaven is piles of trash bags – mountains and mountains of them, everywhere, on every street, on every corner,» he said. «It's Beirut, my friend. Everyone is tossing their garbage but no one is picking it up. People are walking in the streets with masks on. The government doesn't know what to do, can you believe it? An entire country is confused, while your friend, Abu Rateb is following this on TV, like an Ali Baba who's about to enter the cavern.»

Abu Rateb continued to describe the amazing scene. «The anchor hosted someone who appeared to be a connoisseur in the matters of the environment and its defense. He told us that the problem wasn't the organic

waste, which only makes up 30 percent of the garbage. This would eventually dissolve. The problem is the plastic, he said. Imagine! More than 50 percent of it is plastic. «They showed more scenes of it, and my heart nearly stopped. It felt like I was watching someone throw away bread, and then step on it, and then repeat the process over and over again. I was about to cry. I've become black from my head to my toes from burning tires. If they handed over that country to me for a week, I'd fix things and end up rich as well.»

He took a sip of his barley coffee and added, with a sigh, «I can solve the problems of countries, but I can't solve my own problem. It's ridiculous.»

Abu Rateb was cursing his bad luck and I sipped some of his so-called coffee with him, nearly dying of laughter. We were sitting among the golden wheat fields and the sound of warplanes, and the far-off noise of cannon fire. I originally became acquainted with Abu Rateb's sharp sense of humor when I'd open the door for him when he would show up at my home for a visit – even before opening the door, because of the smell of refined oil from burning plastic that he gave off.

«Abu Rateb, you stink,» I'd tell him from behind the door. «That's the smell of money, my boy,» he'd say, beginning a session of much laughter. «Open the door. What do you know. I swear whenever I pass by a girl, she turns to look at me.»

He'd prepare to enter, and say: «I've brought my coffee with me, so I don't trouble you.» Abu Rateb would begin to tell me how he solved this or that problem, all of them concerning daily life and are more complicated than the Russian intervention, the nuclear agreement, or the Turkish position. Like others inside the besieged area of the Ghouta, he'd deny the importance of political and strategic events and claim that they weren't one of his priorities. He didn't do this for no reason, or out of stupidity or ignorance. He would say, while pointing to the roof of my home, «All of your lectures about the problematic signature of the Iranians on the nuclear deal won't change this broken light you have.»



## A waiting trip in the station

Rabih El Amine\*

The «service» taxi driver who drove me to the front of the building, under the large bridge, stops as tells me, «this way.» I look in that direction and see a number of white taxicabs parked on both sides of the road, next to a bus bearing a colored advertisement for a Brazilian coffee brand I haven't heard of before.

I get out of the car and cross the cement barricade that separates me from what should be a parking lot or a bus station. I walk toward the only lit-up container-office to ask about trips to Syria. In front of the container is a yellow banner, written in blue: «Tartus – Baniyas – Jableh – Lattakia» and above that, «Jordan.» I stand in front of the window and wait for the employee to end a conversation on his mobile phone. The conversation drags on, along with my wait. I contemplate the advertisement posted on the bus and the car that is being offered as a prize. It is placed above a drawing of a coffee pot that was hastily done, or at least that's how it seems to me. I imagine the taste of the coffee and its smell; I stopped drinking coffee around ten years ago, when I quit smoking cigarettes.

I turn once again to the employee, who is still on the phone. Perhaps he knows that there is no hurry with my request; the terminal is empty except for the two of us. There are no signs that a vehicle will leave before hours. There are no people, or passengers, or even taxi drivers in front of their cars. They're the ones who usually run after every person who might be a passenger; they don't let them out of their grasp until they can guarantee them as a rider for one of their seats.

The employee and I look at each other as he continues his telephone call, which appears to be a personal one – it

was about his children, and paying for a doctor for his father, and the entire story of some halloum cheese that didn't get to «Abu Wahid.» It's as if he wants to get me involved in his worries; he gestures to me with his eye at the container's door. I look at the door and enter without pausing, as if I was used to visiting the office. With a second movement of his eyes, I sit down on the chair that has a worn-out pillow on it; it's taken on the shape of the chair and the shape of everyone who has sat there.

The employee turns around and looks at me. With a gesture of his eyes, he excuses himself as he says: «A long distance call.» I avoid answering and avoid looking at his eyes. Instead I look at a pile of newspapers under the table. If not for the bottle of blue cleaning liquid placed on top, I wouldn't have known that the newspapers were for wiping the windows in front of us, with its small semi-circle opening at the bottom to allow for communication between the two sides, and the passing of money and tickets back and forth.

A wasp is flying next to the glass, from the inside, where the name of the travel company is reflected. It hits the glass agitatedly and then lands on a cup of tea in front of the employee.

Outside are two men, each with a shoulder-held travel bag, passing in front of us. I try to learn their destination but



my eyes are busy with the fenced wall facing the road. The wall separates the absent passengers from the sea, with its commercial port. That's what I assume from where I sit on a chair, near the place where various goods are loaded on the vehicles. On the wall is a simple drawing of two bicycles, also without riders; it's as if the entire place, with its walls and the drawings, has lost its people.

The wasp leaves the cup of tea and goes back to hitting the glass screen. I stand up and head for the door and leave behind the employee with his interlocutor. Outside, there is no trace of the two men; it's as if they have disappeared. Perhaps they went up to the parked bus, the one with the Brazilian coffee advertisement. I look at the windows of the bus, which are covered by purple curtains. I notice a man and a woman sitting at the front of the bus, waiting for it to leave. I pass

the bus and head for the taxicabs and see one of the drivers placing bags inside his big trunk while his colleague hands them to him. The driver looks at me and asks, «Tartus?» I shake my head and his colleague asks me: «Damascus?» «No,» I say. The two men continue to pack the trunk with bags as I continue to the waiting area, where a semi-circle of cement seats stand. Some are gray, some are of pale colors and some are covered with cardboard. They're originally cardboard boxes that were opened and spread out to make a bed and covers, to protect the sleeper from the cool air coming from the sea, which gets cold at night at this time of the year.

A few people – no more than ten – are sitting or walking around in the open space. Most of them are drivers or station employees. A person selling coffee is also there, memorizing the

orders and disappearing for a while behind the billboard that is empty of any advertisements. There is a small heating plate used for water and to prepare coffee. He pours the water into cups and then returns with the drink while it's hot; the cups are quickly passed out and no mistakes are made. The man takes LL 1,000 for the coffee in a small plastic cup or tea in a larger plastic cup and twice as much for instant coffee in a large cardboard cup.

The coffee seller approaches and asks me what I want to drink. Before I answer he leaves me and moves to a man sitting next to me, and asks him. Before he returns to me I leave the area and return to the container-office. From a distance I can see that the employee has finished his call. I move toward him, and arrive at where he is. I stand behind the glass. I look at him, hesitating a little. He looks

at me. Like someone who has forgotten what they want, I stutter, and apologize, and slowly move away. I reach the road that separates the station from the wall of the port. I stand there and take a last look at the bus terminal, and the drawings of the bicycles. A «service» taxi stops in front of me and I ask its driver, «Hamra?», and I ride next to him.

As the car moves away from the bus station, the sea is gradually revealed to us. As I look at the sea, I think of the coffee advertisement posted on the bus, of the coffee vendor, and how the coffee he was preparing had no odor. Or perhaps I can no longer pick up the smell of coffee after all this time. I close my eyes and imagine what coffee might taste like as I drive the car in the advertisement along the streets of Brazil.

*\*Lebanese writer and filmmaker*

## Memory

# Two memories in a one city

Ali Jazo\*

Memory plays a central role in forming our image of others, and in determining the degree to which we can accept them, or reject them. We are the children of memory to the extent that we're responsible for our actions. Perhaps our actions are somehow the result of our memory, which includes both scars and bright moments; this applies to individuals as well as groups and peoples.

I came to Beirut around two years ago, after the minimum level of options had disappeared in my native country, Syria. My only possible place of refuge was Beirut.

Before coming to Beirut I used to write in *as-Safir*, *al-Hayat* and *al-Mustaqbal* newspapers, all published in the city. My previous memory of Beirut was of newsprint and the words of literature. I can now add to this literary memory – a relatively poor one, perhaps, and one that remains inside the imagination – another memory, focused on the events of daily life. This new memory was fed by new situations and things; the topic of civil marriage in Lebanon became important to me, along with the issue of high rent, that of water and electricity, and the waste issue, as well as many other public affairs and urgent national matters.

Perhaps a poet's experience is different than that of a regular person when it comes to the difficult crisis of Syrian refugees. However, living in a city that is small, vital and tense, and sharing the experiences and dreams of new friends, renders it an experience that is both difficult and alluring at the same time.

During the years of the Syrian military presence in Lebanon (1975-1990), Lebanese didn't get to know most Syrians neither sufficiently nor properly. The majority of Syrians were hidden behind the mask of their country's security regime. Syria was closed on the inside and open to the outside. There were two extremely contradictory types of Syrians living on the Lebanese territory – only two worlds. One world was that of the Syrian soldiers, who were part of a frightening and harsh security regime. The second was that of the poor Syrians, and primarily laborers, who were fleeing the poverty in their country and searching for a job in Lebanon. This was pretty much the only memory that was left behind by the long years of Syria's military presence: the dark memory of soldiers, with the related arbitrariness of legal violations and the lack of respect for personal freedoms. There was also the memory of Syrian workers, whose presence in Lebanon was due to the authoritarian, military regime in their country, which had negatively controlled all the aspects of life and especially economy in light of the scarcity of job opportunities; depriving them of a dignified means of existence in their homeland.

This dual type of Syrian «export» involved contradictions. There's the image of the Syrian soldier on one hand, and that of the poor worker on the other hand. Syria was summed up by these two types and the memory of the Lebanese prior to the spring of 2011 was formed on these foundations. Today, Lebanese have discovered another type of Syrians – they came to Lebanon

in huge waves, fleeing war, fear and destruction. Over time, many of them settled in various cities and towns in Lebanon, and the Lebanese-Syrian interaction has experienced a change. Syrians no longer come to impose their dominance but rather to search for protection and security. Lebanese, meanwhile, have encountered Syrians who differ from the previous image in their minds, the one that was present prior to the outbreak of the Syrian uprising.

The new Syrians, who are residing in Lebanon until further notice, and who are mostly young, are cleansing the joint memory of the Syrian and Lebanese peoples. There is a new lifestyle and new necessities of coexistence, despite the difficulty of competing over public resources, which gives the upper hand to harmony and reconciliation in the relationship that for many years was imbalanced, due to the Syrian presence in Lebanon. The new Syrians are civilians and have no military background. Among them are students, writers and artists; there are also workers, merchants and rich people. One can say that middle-class Syrians – or those who remained of this group – were able to survive and remain in Lebanon, whether in terms of finding job opportunities or due to the healthy daily relations that emerged between Lebanese and Syrians.

Perhaps we can understand why some Lebanese rejected the huge numbers of Syrian refugees arriving in Lebanon over a short period of time, based on their

earlier memory of Syrians; it was one of rejection and feelings of humiliation because of the Syrian regime's behavior in the country. And despite the scarcity of resources and economic pressure, the psychological factor plays an important role on this front.

Meanwhile and this is highly significant, another image of Syrian refugees has emerged; the reason why Syrians are present in Lebanon is the same reason as to why Lebanese rejected the former Syrian military presence. It truly is a unique moment, as those who are now fleeing the huge Syrian prison are those who resemble the Lebanese writers and journalists who fell victims to the Syrian regime. The just cause that is fleeing hell (i.e. the Syrians) has caught up to the former image of these people; they are now in a new phase of presenting a true picture of themselves, which is no easy matter.

Nonetheless, and over the passage of time, a type of reliance will emerge after we earlier believed it to be strange and temporary, or unacceptable and intolerable. Sometimes, a correct idea requires time to take root, while at other times memory returns and performs its valuable and vital task. This time, it is by looking beyond the dark images, to a memory based on the future, which guarantees a dignified life to all.

The daily Syrian struggle in Lebanon, just like the struggle of Lebanese activists, offers a new image to a world without fear or hatred.

*\*Syrian writer and poet*

# Syrian Theater in Lebanon

Abido Bacha\*

(To Dario, alone, pearl of the two Easts)

**Syrian theater has achieved a lot in the past years. It won't be chatter, and I will mention some of the names. Saadallah Wannous, Fawaz al-Sajer, Manuel Jiji, Naila al-Atrash, Ghassan Massoud, Ayman Zeidan, Assaad Fouda, Duraid Lahham, Nuhad Qalai and Muhammad al-Maghut. They based their works on contemporary theories. They did well and they didn't. For absence of disparity is a dead art. An art of the dead.**

The Arab man's idea of theater is one. That speech is an organic art. An image of a deadman dreaming of life. Since the mid-twentieth century, compelling moments had illuminated Syrian theater; no one remembers them now, none of the two audiences of the war in Syria. Main doorway to what does not count as an art of speech. «The People of the Cave» by Fawazal-Sajer, «An evening with Abu Khalil Qabbani», and «Forget Herostratus». Tens of titles burn with the fire of anxiety of civilizations. That was on one bank. On the other bank, attempts of metaphor or interpretation of the fascinating essences of the different paths in the world were many. The «Shawk Theater's» (Theater of Thorns) experience is an essence of Syrian theater. The conscience of the theater world is an essence of Syrian theater. Where determined attempts were made to institutionalize the theater world, with buildings and structures erected away from the vibrations.

Theater took the high ground on the authority's interpretations of reality and the field. The gulf between the two is wide. The theater build tiers on the ground of reality, as well as layers of narration were erected in the theater.

No one remembers anymore because the relationship with the environment is no longer confined to its relationship to the theater, to the aesthetic propensities of contemporary practices alone. As the tumult of war has eclipsed all attempts at analysis of the relationship of the past to the present, defining the latter in terms of an extension of the former. For Syria possessed the scriptures of theatre by luring in and hunting down metaphors. The national theater, the traveling theater, the workers' theater. No one remembers anymore because the five-year war did not compel Syrian dramatists to create prose in theater but to scatter the theater with war. Until parts of the components of this theater-faces that cut the distance to «the happy time» and faces still lying bare in the open cruel, realistic and arbitrary times—until these faces move to other counties, other pavements, other tones, where it seemed that they were preparing for the entrance of other images of Syrian theater on paths that did not get shorter and won't get shorter as the war drags on. Nothing to panic about here, except for good citizens preoccupied with providing for their burdensome days in faraway countries after the vessels carrying their dreams crashed on the shores of new cities and their neglected classes. Since then, Syrian dramatists have been expanding the circle of their presence in Lebanon instead of decisively changing the rules of the game. For the Syrian theater presence today is a bridge to its previous presence in Lebanon during the Syrian war. A space that does not provide answers to the essential issues, where this art is deemed a linguistic phenomenon. A phenomenon that does not arouse the enthusiasm but of drinking buddies in digging up the remains of looted times and aborted dreams. Nothing remarkable beyond this fact. The Lebanese contributed, in the words of some Syrian dramatists, to concepts of sharing what is sensed between the aesthetic dimension of art and its other dimensions. The social dimension leads. For alignment has pushed the theater into embarking without a search for the new visible aesthetic language. A language that would enrich and change how the Arabs perceive this art. No hyperbole here, as many affirm that the presence of the Syrian theater experience in Lebanon during the past four to five years is a presence of using theater in the ongoing conflict in Syria, in translating the audience's language to the stage, rather than the language of art or the artist. Thus theater has become a public place. A fixed place that does not liberate its practitioners from the trap of populism. An audience of the neighborhood's residents. Not a mixed audience of this neighborhood's residents and those of other neighborhoods. Instincts of life more than a distinction of life. Wael Ali's «You Know I Do Not remember» trapped creativity in the manifestations of external movement, as part of a voyage prepared to narrate the biography of a man who opposed power in the past years. A former detainee recounts his experience of prison and detainment without creating what the dramatist usually shares with the audience. Because the audience of the show is ready. A play by someone from the opposition. The audience of the play is from the opposition. Everyone realized that if they stepped into Tournesol Theater, what the Europeans call theater does not exist. They did not realize it, because they placed themselves in the folds of the narrative, while they were at home or in the other available spaces for their meetings. An audience on the stage, not in the

hall, surrounded the former prisoner. The latter did not narrate his story or the story of those who stood by him during that period, because he was responding to the questions of a man with a clear political stance, reaffirming them as he reminded the audience through photographs and filmed excerpts of events from the man's experience, the gentle man, the man fretting from the people flocking around him. Fretting even more over the basis of the relationship between him and those who want to increase the audience's trust in him by uncovering even more of his – the narrator's – losses. No basis for interpretation. Because the theater has bound itself here to occupying pure politics, a platform whose terminology cannot be found in the dictionary but rather in the book of war, death, killing, destruction and fragmentation. The man's presence was heavy, he was muttering rather than narrating, because narration in this case does not liberate. Because narration here organizes the gathering, organizes speech in a specific space, in ready-made space. We observe through political generalizations and in a rush, scattered exhibits, not parts of a show unified in form. An old «Hyde Park».

Tournesol Theater is one of the bridges of «opposition shows.» A bridge to bring the show its volume of audiences, by scrambling audience and speech, nothing more. It has nothing to do with curiosity. The relationship between theater and play is based on political urgency. An urgency that provides ties between the play's team and the theater administration. The guest show did not get an adventure. Adventures of touch and adventures of sight. Because it disrupted the concept of national identity, through the disruption of the concept of identity of the Lebanese. The message of one brother becomes the message of two brothers. A shared message, a shared handwriting, shared ink and shared words. Suspicion grows, not the opposite, as mines increase instead of dismantling previous mines. Thus the Syrian play sticks to the Lebanese mural with its dialogues made of tense, amputated phrases and its fragmented scenes. Thus the Syrian play finds itself in the Lebanese counterculture. Remnants on ruins. No essence, no plots. Because the dialects of life – the joy of working in theater is a dialect of life – have stopped rotating, since the process of restoration of the human soul has come to resemble those popular plastic surgeries.

No networks for interpreting artistic and cultural compositions or trends. For interpretation here refers to interpreting reality on the ground of reality. As the dramatist or theater owner perceives reality. A reality with ties to exclusive ready-made contexts on the territory of war and on the territory of the one heading the theater. A head of theater preoccupied with determining the direction instead of resorting to a compass. Creativity is not a precondition to the relationship between the two. There is something dubious. Thus news recurred of threats received by the administration of Tournesol Theater as it insisted on showing «You Know I Don't Remember.»

One of the telling signs in this context was that an online newspaper proposed that I write about Wael Ali's performance. Then, it contacted me again to ask me to write about another play. Because a certain Syrian oppositionist – at the newspaper – had insisted on publicizing it after detecting in it beforehand the call to prayer of the faithful and hymns of the opposition. The newspaper published the two articles (mine and that of a Syrian colleague) within days of each other. No wonder that a love relationship developed between said colleague and the Syrian performance. Whereas I was tied to it by a bitter sweet relationship.

The colleague pumped her political stance in the play's atmosphere. A great drawback. Two conforming positions. The conformity created an uproar that overshadowed the elements of the show – its rare, artistic elements. The result: a play of alerts and criticism that does not alert because it is not criticism. A clamorous chaos. A biennale not a play. The theater offers a favor here. Theater does not offer anything but the plague. Excommunicating the other by printing and publishing long lists of accusations. The play is no longer an event. It has become an occasion. The world of criticism, at this time, has become a host of primitive ideas at an age of active and productive digital products. Ideas that do not have any power to subjugate theater with all its rightful intellectual, cultural, historical and political fields. Theater is just a corpse of itself.

Syrian theatre shows have chosen here to arm themselves with political machismo. Every human is a political macho in Lebanon. No place for theater then. No probing of depths.

Theater is a flat land. Part of the Lebanese mobilized to strategically lay the groundwork for the presence of part of the Syrian theater in Lebanon. An existential presence. The Lebanese people's upbringing has something to do with this, with its ready-made chemistry to form reactionary bands. The chemistry between «some» and the «other» (the Lebanese and the Syrian or the Lebanese and the French alike) is available to every applicant as long as the two parties are in agreement, prior to agreement. An agreement that distills the chemistry of happiness from the raging images of war, on the edges of devastated towns and villages. Any talk of Lebanese racism, is talk with no visionary insight. No racism. This is a problematic that dominates another space not that of theater.

Those who work at Tournesol Theater preserve the banks of the Arabic language through their relationship to Syrian plays with goals to achieve triumph over the other side through skills and opportunities. Hanane Hajj Ali, the playwright, Roger Assaf's wife and founder of Tournesol, has a clear political stance. A stance that reinforces the stances of dramatists of the opposition by Tournesol putting on Syrian works characterized by war concepts and not those of qualitative accumulation. To come close to opposition plays is to come close to the special sound layers. The pillar of the new history. This is a sensitive issue that not many delve into. Every question in this field is a voyage into the unknown. An unfulfilled visa. That is natural before the single shared desire where visions are related to the many flashes of dream and fear. No one will share with the other what they are thinking. What he strives to receive and accomplish. Every time I asked, the one I asked became a portrait hanging on the walls of the city. Ghassan Massoud explained this by the fact that the Syrian artist's fall into the abyss of the Syrian war is a free fall. The war knocked him off with a stunning blow. No identity checks for Syrians because the Syrian presents his identity on his body. His political identity. When I asked Hanane Hajj Ali about some of the dramatists, she set me on the tracks to the «dramaturge» at Babel Theater. Another theater that hosted other plays. There, at the theater located on Hamra Street, on the side of AUBMC, works a young man by the name of Muhammad Issam Qaddour. A young, quiet, polite and cautious man. The young man with his dreadlocks affirmed that Syrian shows at this theater are neither for nor against the Syrian regime, neither for nor against the Syrian opposition. This a precondition of speech in these difficult days. Theaters are spaces. That's true. But theaters use any methods to survive amidst the economic crisis. Methods of influence are present but they are limited. Their features won't become any clearer. For Syrian plays are few on Lebanese stages. The letter C cannot be born out of the womb of M when we compare the numbers of Syrian plays with Lebanese plays. A letter cannot be born out of another letter. Among the dozens of Lebanese plays on Lebanese stages there are a few Syrian plays. Some Lebanese plays come to the rescue of their playwrights in translating their anxieties. Other plays do not come to the rescue of other playwrights. The Syrian play does not come to the rescue of the Syrian playwright. Because Syrian time is different from Lebanese time. Syrian time does not have the patience of the wondrous Lebanese time. Lebanese plays knock on the door of time with wondrous softness and patience. Talking to Muhammad Qaddour is more of a surgical operation. He emotionally defended Hanane Hajj Ali. The ritual of birth of one from another. Muhammad Qaddour was born on the tongue of Hajj Ali. And here Hanane is born adult on the tongue of Muhammad Qaddour. I did not reveal to Qaddour that Hanane directed me to him. The young man reaffirmed that Hanane is a woman of «directions.» A Syrian-Lebanese institution at the head of a Syrian institution. The horizon of the relationship here is a symbolic one. An equally symbolic and material positioning. This will lead to a rhythmic elision and an emotional charge.

Syrian dramatists were not affected by the Lebanese experience. No uterine influences apart from the technical level. For this level is not considered much at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Damascus. «An academy with recognized methods of training actors and directors, but it does not provide theater practitioners with the technical magic. Sound, lighting and cinematography. The Syrian creative dramatists have gained it from their Lebanese presence.» Qaddour confirmed that the Syrian shows in Lebanon remain on the throne of Syrian achievements. Each Syrian play is a Cinderella play, the day will

soon come when she marries the prince or remains a barren, old maid. Nothing to do with mixing, in merging «one» into the «other.» No Lebanese sensitivities in Syrian plays. On the contrary. The Lebanese plays the role of catalyst in processes of timing the vision, not improving it, except on the technical level. An amputated level in Syria.

There are institutions and bodies that fund the shows that have a direct link to the war in Syria. «Etijahat» (Directions), Afaq, Culture Resource. There is no emotionality in Qaddour's words. There is a statement of fact. Babel has only hosted neutral shows. «Above Zero» by Osama Halal. An interpretation of six photos that became widely known during the war. Child marriage. Field executions. A mix of drama and contemporary dance. «Could You Please Look into the Camera» directed by Omar Abusaada performed by Ayham Alagha. «For a yes or for a no» directed and performed by Majd Foudda. The horizon of the theater is tied to the economic issue. For Babel Theater is a theater on the verge of closure. The theater audience in Lebanon is an opening night audience. Babel Theater hosted Syrian shows as well as Lebanese shows. Not to reopen old wounds. But motivated by mutual help. The theater opened its doors to many Lebanese shows. «Mama» by Mark Khreich. «Venus» by Jacques Maroun. And others. The theater system of utterance is an economic system. Nothing beyond the economic. Qaddoura did not forget to mention the «Citizenship Organization» founded by Omar al-Jebai. It funds Syrian play directly. Plays that do not merely hint at their opposition of the regime. Underground shows. Hyde Park shows. Or Bordel Clandestine shows. No derogatory implications in the latter description. Shows gathering masses. Or mass gathering. Shows in the margins of Beirut and other cities. Or in villages. Roads, do not destroy nor build. The Syrian play will not grow but in Syria, in Syrian towns. Its presence is a lacking presence in Lebanon or any other country for that matter. But not in Syria. Because theater is urban. Location is symbolic, the moment of getting away from Damascus, Homs,

Hama or Aleppo. No influences. No touching partnerships. The wound would not result in ties and links to theater but in Syria. Figures offering assistance are not lacking. Limited assistance. Offering halls for play rehearsals, for free or in return for a nominal fee. Theaters won't succeed with Syrian theater shows with director signatures. Theater is a garden not a house. The play gets old a day or two after it is shown. Because it takes place in a hole not in a life. Works will not stop gathering. «You Know I Don't Remember.» Oussama Ghanam presented many plays («Last Tape.» for example). «The Two Immigrants» by Samer Omran. «Small Rooms» by Wael Qaddour. «The Center» by Sari Moustapha. «The Window» by Omar al-Jebai. Majd Foudda turned around Pinter's «For a yes or...» to a relative partnership between the Lebanese and Syrians. He and Lebanese actors. No pregnancy here. Just a meeting of voices with the aim of lightening the burden of exile. Many shows beg the aid of associations, institutions and international funds. Poor shows. A show in Akkar, another one in Saida or in Beirut. Theater and non-theater shows. As the concert «Thank you, Lebanon» (Babel). The «Sakakeen» (Knives) play was another partnership. A partnership between Lebanese and Syrian amateurs. Shown in Marjayoun. A play presented by sixty Syrian children in a village in the Beqaa valley. The occasion that entailed this stage work was the World Day Against Child Labour. The theater director is indifferent to the identity of the audience. Syrian, Lebanese, Jordanian, Iraqi. That is why he does not target a specific audience with his theater work. Beirut is suitable because Cairo is too big, while theater Amman lacks the welcoming conditions. Hashem Adnan, a member of the Lebanese Zoukak Company, observes a form of resistance on the part of the Lebanese to Syrian artists. He says: «Racism. There are Syrians (he does not wish to give names) who consider Beirut to be a trap. No free space in Lebanon. Beirut is cruel. She does not love anyone, does not believe in anyone, while she continually asks of others to express their fascination and love for her. A part of them have

emigrated. A part returned to Syria. And there are those who live in the delimitation zone between Beirut and Damascus. Like the director Omar Abusaada. The latter brought his play «Antigone» to Lebanon after it was shown in Damascus and then he returned with his play to Damascus. The play was performed in Al Madina Theater in Beirut presenting the Syrian tragedy as a fathomless abyss. Rafat Alzaqout presented «Toutatouta...» Wael Qaddoura presented «The Virus» and Fares al-Dhahabi «Wind.» «Al Mawred...» by Adnan Awde. «Paris in the Shade» by Yam Mashahadi.

There are tens of Syrian artists living in Lebanon who have not reduced their presence in theater. Ghassan Massoud, Abdul Munim Amayri, Amal Arafa, Jamal Suliman among others. Not because they are loyal to television works, because they know better, they know that Syrian theater is but a visitor. A branch of theater, not its source. And that television works bind better than theater works. Plays won't work a miracle. The theater won't stop living. Although many won't find in visitor plays their aspirations. They will not find their lives or their living or aquatic forms. The body fully present, without joining a charter. Sitting in the corner. A play cannot fix a shattered mirror. The two sides won't find agreement. The door won't open. This is how Lebanese press deal with plays shown in Syria, with a thirst of coming in contact, while media secret words are not handed to plays put on stage in Lebanon. This is an essential indication. Newspapers only hear of vague echoes of these works. Sound bites. Plays do not remain the same over time. The longer they remain outside of Syria, the more their braids unravel. A dysfunctional fan. One of its manifestations is that Syrians have benefited from the relationship of the Lebanese to their media. They learned skills that weaken the talismans of the relationship to the other, to theater, and outside the theater. What remains is plays that cheer. Not plays that call. And the gulf between the two is an abyss.

\*Lebanese artist, critic and theater researcher

## Performance

# «A Thousand and One Titanics»: Actors and puppets narrate the horrors of migration in a silent performance

The «A Thousand and one Titanics» performance narrates the horrors endured by the migrants by sea and the reasons that compel tens of thousands of people to leave behind their countries and their lives and ride the sea on a hazardous journey, seeking the dream of finding themselves human again beyond the overseas.

The performance discusses the ruthless migration scene that captures media attention today and triggers deep concerns on a worldwide scale using puppetry, contradicting the image engraved in the minds of many: that this type of theater is limited to children entertainment.

The performance, for the most part, avoids the tragedy in approaching this issue; it tackles it using expressions that hold lightness, satire, fantasy, playfulness, magic and theater tricks to speak with the audience about the difficult situation of migration in a light and entertaining style that falls under the «Magic Box (The puppet theater).»

This silent performance steps lightly out of the norms of the puppet show; all of its components on stage change into puppets: from farm animals covering in the village not spared by death and aircraft rockets pounding the small village, to the traveler's suitcase that refuses to leave, the boats of immigrants whose fate and that of their passengers are played with by the waves and the big raging sea that swallows up tens of people by the day, along with their dreams, their stories and their tragedies... They are all puppets that join the actors and interact on stage.

I wanted this show to be silent, and its pace accompanied by musical elements, that is at times performed live and recorded at others, out of willingness to put across how the issue of immigration goes beyond language and territory and willingness that the show goes, with its

target audience, beyond language and territory as well.

The props we have used to design the stage sets and puppets are all derived from the kinds of things typically found in a refugee's rucksack. Newspapers, plastic bags, and cardboard boxes. They are also a sign of the immigrant's vulnerability against the machine of oppression and war and the tough journey.

The show that plays for nearly fifty minutes tells a story, narrated by Scheherazade to Shahryar, of a young man who lives in a village in the East; the village comes under war, which compels him to leave. The chapters of the story then unfold between the peaceful cardboard village before being hit by rockets and the thoughts of migration that cross the young man's mind; he ends up amidst the waves of the sea, off of the European dream costs and amid the callous waves and their dreadful rumble. The ending is open, same as the question that finds no answer: Should people be fleeing war into the risk of riding the sea and the potential death that rises with every wave? Or should they stay in the country, with the daily possibility of death with every shot? This resembles the immigrants' internal psychological paradox of staying in their birthplace where dangers reside or deracinating themselves into a safe country that looks nothing like them.

«A Thousand and One Titanics» toured in two theater festival in Sweden and Denmark, as well as visiting refugee communities in these two countries. It then moved to Beirut, then to the Syrian and Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and finally to the Festival of Carthage in Tunisia.

The following dialogue took place with the director of the play Mahmoud Hourani, a British Palestinian residing in Beirut:

### How did you come to choose this topic?

The migration issue has become a part of our daily living, hunting us down in daily news, the news we listen to, and the painful scenes we watch through the media. Therefore, the topic imposed itself upon us and we decided to address it in our play.

### Why the name «A thousand and one Titanics»?

The painful sinking of the Titanic ship took place in the early twentieth century, and coincidentally, that ship carried migrants abroad too... These days, a boat or a ship sinks each day on its way out from our country carrying migrants, and it sinks tragically in the middle of the sea.

### Does the play carry a message deeper than just the story of a migrant human being?

Yes. The play recounts the story of a migrant, but it might try to state that the migrant is not necessarily a suspect or an accused person. The migrant is a person who once had a home, a farm, a window, a land, and then circumstances led him or her to leave his life in his home country and escape to the country of others...which are circumstances we should all be familiar with.

### What does the presence of Scheherazade, Shahryar and the A Thousand and One Nights atmosphere mean in the first and last chapters of the play?

The whole world knows about our country in the East through A Thousand and One Nights, and probably the whole world is curious about the East that attracts many westerners who are



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interested in its charm and splendor... But the East today is not similar to what is has engraved in the typical memory. Often when we would be listening to the news of Baghdad these days, we'd think: «If Scheherazade lived in Baghdad nowadays, she would have sought refuge in one of the safe countries.»

On another hand, we wanted, through A Thousand and One Nights feel that is present in the performance, to state that there are no beautiful stories coming from our countries these days that are told. Unfortunately, the only stories are terrifying and calamitous... The Magic Carpet itself does not constitute a solution in our country anymore. A visa maybe is more important than moving on the Magic Carpet.

### Your play took place in light of what is happening in Syria and the massive Syrian migration. Is it about Syrian people in particular?

What is happening to our people in Syria is really sad and painful, but our play is about every human being who was forced to migrate and leave his country, about the atrocity and consequences of war. This has happened and might happen in many places. It might be in Yemen or Gaza or South of Lebanon or Colombia or Aleppo.

### Do you think one can approach a hard subject such as migration in a style that verges on irony, same as you did?

Yes, it is very possible, and it was intentional in our performance. We wanted to present the subject in an artistic and human form as much as possible, to guarantee that we are addressing the heart and mind of the spectator. We wanted to be closer to the heart of the spectator, instead of presenting a tragic case in a tragic way that increases the pain. The crew of the play comprises a number of refugees. I myself am unfortunately originally a refugee.

## Standing accused, as a «Syrian-Lebanese»

Khaled Khalifeh\*

When we were children standing in the schoolyard, the principal would engage in an agitated explanation as he tried to respond to the question: Why did the Syrian army intervene in the Lebanese Civil War?

I remember hearing ambiguous phrases such as «halt the fighting between brothers,» and «the need to preserve civil peace.» It's strange that I can still remember this rhetoric even though nearly 40 years have passed. I still remember the precise details – but later on, and after all these years, I understood that these expressions were merely a cover for what we didn't dare call occupation, or tutelage.

However, this tutelage – which the regime worked tirelessly to justify over the last four decades – remained a source of shame that could not be denied, and governed my personal relationship with Lebanon. I was one of the Syrians who traveled the least to Lebanon, even though as a Syrian citizen I wasn't responsible for what was taking place. I had no justification for Syria's intervention in the Civil War and its play on the contradictions that were raging between the Lebanese.

The sight of Lebanese politicians who would travel to the Presidential Palace increased my feelings of shame. I'll say that I withdrew within myself and because I have no kinder expression for it, I decided that Beirut was not my favorite city. I visited it only a few times over the decades, and justified this by saying that Beirut was no longer that splendid place that every Syrian writer must experience. The feelings of shame accompanied me at every moment; we were a party to the Lebanese Civil War and not peacemakers.

Several long decades unfolded before the Syrian Army left Lebanon, after the Hariri assassination. The sight of that exit also filled me with shame: soldiers who were poor, and defeated, and among them were officers who smuggled out ceramics, cigarettes and whiskey, and everything that could be smuggled. Lebanese and international banks were home to their money, under conditions of total respect. I often thought that this history, which accompanied the people of my generation, was overflowing with contradictions. But I discovered something dangerous early on. Syrian policy in Lebanon prevented any type of coordination – even feelings of solidarity – between Syrians who rejected their country's intervention in Lebanon and Lebanese who didn't know that the regime in Syria didn't mean the Syrian people.

This complicated and problematic relationship, despite its stark clarity, required the Syrian uprising to destroy the wall that was built over four decades between Lebanese and Syrians and restore some truth to the picture.

This wall collapsed during the first days with the collapse of the wall of fear in Syria, with the first demonstrations. The idea of a single people in two countries began to grow little by little, – but in contrast to what had been promoted in the past, meaning that the Lebanese would not dream of freedom before change came to Syria.

The Lebanese were divided between those who support the Syrian revolution and opponents of it. This is the only true picture of the relations since 1976, when the Syrian army entered Lebanon with Arab and international approval. The image of Syrians in the minds of Lebanese has changed, from occupier to revolutionary, fleeing violence, displaced, refugee, ally, enemy, etc.

Every day we see aspects of the new relationship

between Syrians and Lebanese become clearer, erasing what came before. Despite the painful incidents that took place with Syrian refugees, it was as if the old image of Syrians was destroyed in the minds of Lebanese.

Yes, four decades have passed since that day in school when I was a young boy. The image has yet to be erased from my memory, along with that of refugee tents being burned, or refugees being demeaned in these camps, or on the borders. It won't be erased from the memories of Syrians and refugees in particular, and this time the identity of the «enemy» is clear.

The image is very clear, contrary to the past. It marks a proper beginning to the establishment of natural relations between Syrians and Lebanese, after the war is over and a new, democratic Syria is born; these ties will be clearer in the future. The map of allies will change and everyone will begin to examine our history once again as a necessary step to ridding ourselves of feelings of regret.

I'm not being trite when I talk about the history of the last 40 years. However, there is a kind of hope that always gives me the strength to express myself and acknowledge that we have divided up a common history full of pain and tears. We should make a concerted effort to divide up the future in order to purify our common memory, and not remain silent about what has happened. We as individuals, or as peoples in the region, did not choose this past. When we possess our future, which has been stolen from us over the last half-century, we should have the courage to acknowledge to define our lives once again. We have a common destiny and what has taken place in the past, recently and not so recently, can't be erased by geography.

Yes, it's not easy to change the collective feelings of people but in the Syrian-Lebanese case, we should believe that it's not impossible. We can't close the doors in the face of the coming change, which won't forgive those involved in killing Lebanese, Palestinians and Syrians, and everyone who exploited humanitarian issues – such as that of the Syrian refugees – for narrow political ends.

Lebanese defend Syrians in Lebanon whoever they are, because they are simply defending their children's future. They are well aware of the identity of those who turned Syria and Lebanon into wastelands, monopolized the definition of patriotism, history and geography, and turned the countries into garbage dumps.

The only certainty I know is that the principal of an elementary school will not stand up to justify the domination of another people, whatever it's called, after the collapse of the rhetoric of hypocrisy that has cost us so much blood and pain. We won't allow any principal in the future to once again make accusations against me – we won't permit any rhetoric that considers refugees to be enemies, urging that their tents should be burned, that they be demeaned and killed, and subjected to the exploitation of their miserable conditions.

Yes, the lines of the old images, full of blood and hypocrisy, will be erased. In the new image, I feel truly wonderful that I, as a Syrian-Lebanese, won't face accusations again.

\* Syrian novelist and scriptwriter, his work includes «No knives in this city's kitchens» and «In Praise of Hatred» and the TV series «Relative silence»

## Exodus

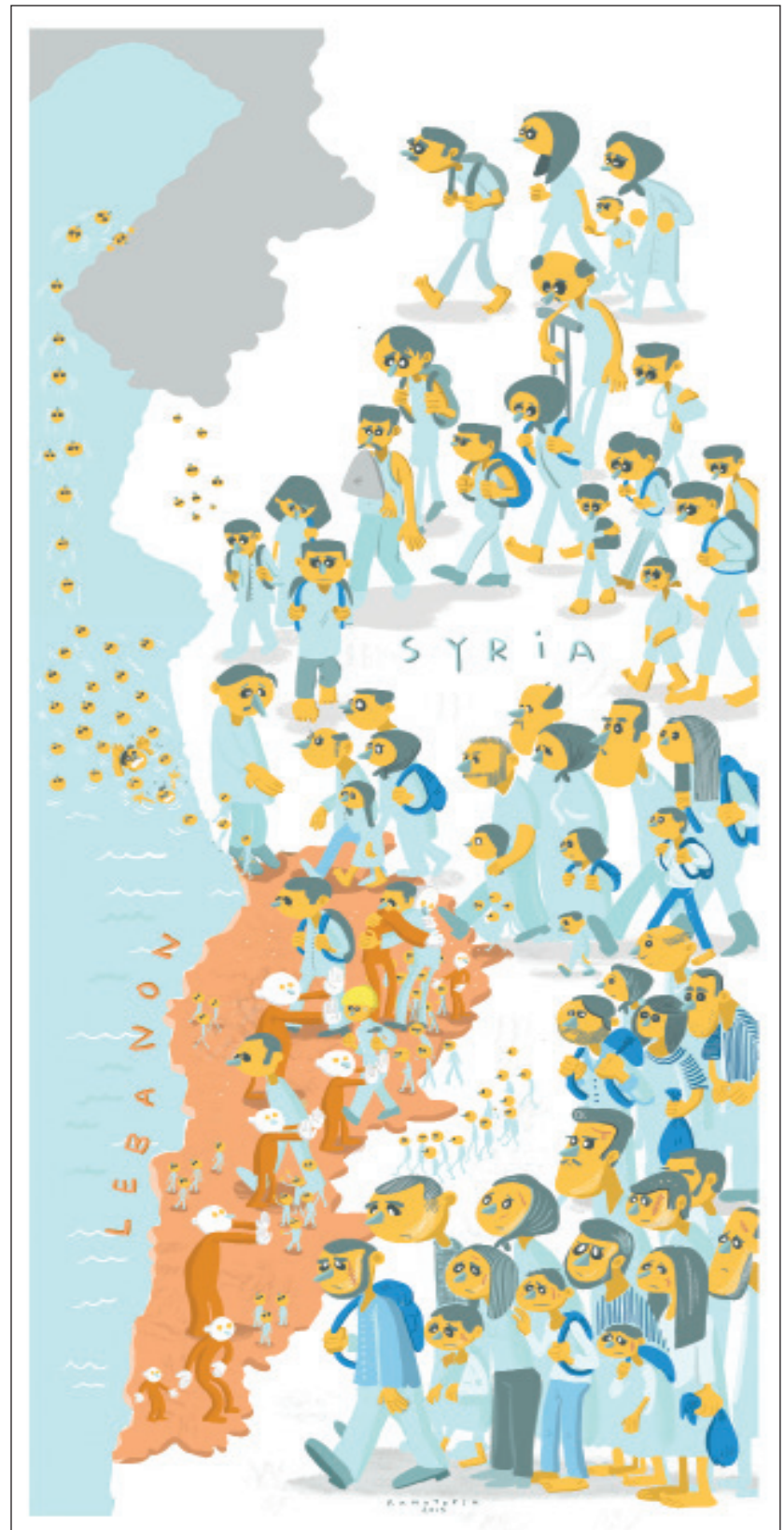


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