

The Peace Building In Lebanon

Joint news supplement

Issue n° 11, March 2016



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Special Edition

This supplement is produced by the UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» project, funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development through KfW. The Arabic version is distributed with An-Nahar and As-Safir newspapers while the English version is distributed with The Daily Star and the French version with L'Orient-Le Jour.

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.



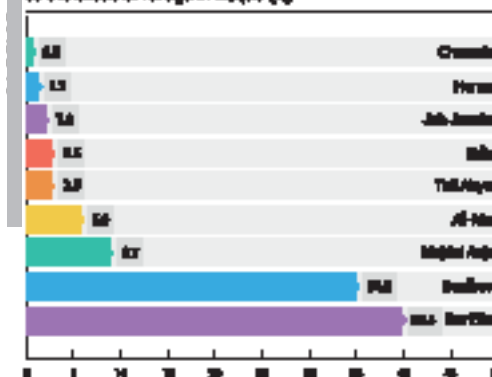
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Refugees and citizens united by a tragedy preceding the war

Children with disabilities in an environment that disregards their needs

Distribution of disabled children according to the areas of refuge in Beirut (%)



Report from the «Building peace with disabilities» pilot study conducted with disabled children project, implemented by the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Children's Association (LPHCA) and UNDP.

Backing Lebanon's Stability

Throughout the Syrian crisis, the world has not lost sight of the plight of around five million Syrian refugees and displaced persons, according to UNHCR. In view of the enormous challenges faced by the three main host countries, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, Germany has co-hosted the London Conference, between 4 and 6 February this year, that united heads of States and Governments in reaffirming their commitment to the Syrian refugees.

The London Conference has set the tone for a new promising approach, which allows for viewing the crisis from a new angle for both refugees and host communities. Germany remains committed to backing Lebanon's stability as in previous years and has now renewed its promise to support Lebanon on multiple levels. We will work with the Government of Lebanon and many other partners to boost economic growth, help create new jobs, and ensure that all refugees get access to a decent education by 2017. We aim to achieve these targets through a strategic and integrated approach that supports both refugees and Lebanese host communities facing difficult living conditions. Acknowledging the power of media in bringing about and supporting the realization of positive outcomes as the ones set in the London conference, I hope that supporting an initiative such as this supplement will contribute to shed light on successes and stories of hope that can defuse tensions. Equally important, I am optimistic that such a platform will promote more comprehensive and balanced coverage of events which is very much sought for in times of crisis as the one we are facing.

Ambassador Martin Huth
Chargé d'affaires of Germany

UNDP Celebrating 50 Years of Service

With the Syrian crisis entering into its sixth year, the implications continue to spill over to neighboring countries and beyond. One of the most recent responses to the effects of the conflict was the gathering of heads of states and dignitaries, in support of Syrian refugees and host countries, that took place in London between the 4th and 6th of February this year. The conference set ambitious goals that aim to transform the ongoing crisis into an opportunity to improve the future of both the refugees and hosting countries. Lebanon is among the host countries that has generously provided assistance to refugees. Its communities have shared their economy, schools, clinics, water and basic services provided by central and local authorities. Six years on, however the crisis has taken a heavy toll on these communities, threatening their survival and the country's civil peace. The London Conference took place just in time to bring hope back to both refugees and their host communities. The conference outcomes also promise to boost the flagging economy, curb unemployment rates, and overhaul the country's infrastructure, while simultaneously preserving the dignity of refugees and addressing their basic humanitarian needs.

UNDP is at the forefront of supporting Lebanon's host communities and is fully mobilized to achieve the goals set at the London Conference, particularly in the fields of job creation, basic services provision, and the promotion of peace. UNDP's resolute aim to support Lebanon this year coincides with its 50th anniversary. More than ever, UNDP is determined to be proactive and pre-emptive

in addressing Lebanon's developmental challenges, narrowing the regional inequalities that undermine its social stability, arresting its environmental degradation, and further supporting the Government's institutions. UNDP will strive to achieve these goals at a time when volatility has become the new norm. On the occasion of UNDP turning 50 this year, the long lasting relationship between UNDP and Lebanon is also being celebrated. As was the case during the years of war, there is a commitment, stronger than ever, to stand by Lebanon to help it face current multiple challenges, and to support it in achieving the new Sustainable Development Goals, against all odds. As an advocate of the new Goals, UNDP seeks to use this valuable supplement as a tool for change and for the promotion of peaceful, non-violent and anti-discriminatory approaches to working with communities. Within this framework, topics related to host communities and refugees are discussed, and special attention is given to their legal, cultural, economic and creative dimensions. We trust that initiatives such as this supplement can contribute to bolstering relationships with Syrians refugees, in hopes that one day they will be able to return safely to their homeland and look back favorably at the country where they once found refuge.

Luca Renda
UNDP Country Director

Two questions

As a logical result of the storm caused by the decision of Angela Merkel to open wide the sluice gates for the reception of almost one million Syrian refugees in Germany, the external borders of Europe are now being knocked over from all sides by the influx of tens of thousands of destitute and penniless migrants, rushed at the risk of their lives towards this El Dorado, the praise of which has always been vocalized in terms of rights and liberties.

But what good do rights and liberties bring when an economic and financial wealth does not follow? Yet, Europe is not America, and it has long ago ceased to be destined an immigration land. The crisis and unemployment stretched out their tentacles, and the refugees are not driven by the search for a better future to knock on the doors of the old continent, but rather by the survival instinct. This sort of primal reflex that drives men, women and children to throw themselves into the arms of dishonest and unscrupulous smugglers, to brave raging seas, and to find themselves, once they get out safe, confined in camps that are officially temporary but are obviously meant to last.

Today, Europe is overwhelmed and has to beg for some indulgence from Turkey's part to agree on containing the flood of migrants on its land. A strange appeal to generosity in return of hard cash: 3 billion Euros at the time of the first request, probably followed by 3 more, with the hope that Ankara will settle for this...

In light of this rather dishonorable result, two questions pop naturally into one's mind: How come not a single wealthy Arab country suggested assuming at least a meager share of the migrants, instead of leaving Lebanon and Jordan, who had already drew the short straw, bear such a heavy burden, all by themselves?

Why does Europe, and more generally the West, continue to compete over the urges of generosity towards refugees and conversely manifest so much permissiveness in imposing a solution in Syria?

Gaby Nasr
Managing Editor
L'Orient-Le Jour supplements

Understanding the impact of the crisis on Lebanon

Crises are relative, and depending on the circumstances and capacities of those they afflict, these challenges can range from a simple inconvenience to a devastating cataclysm with far-reaching consequences.

The Syrian refugee crisis is one such challenge whose impact will prove debilitating for Lebanon if left unresolved, and for numerous reasons. Certainly Lebanon's already-creaking infrastructure is taking the brunt of the influx of refugees. The 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees, and at least another 400,000 persons, now equal more than a third of the country's Lebanese population of some 4 million, heavily taxing the meager resources of Lebanon, which even before the arrival of the refugees was struggling with inadequate electricity and water supplies. To truly understand the impact of the crisis on this tiny Middle Eastern country and put things in perspective, keep in mind that while Jordan and Turkey are also grappling with the refugee issue, the former is nearly eight times as large as Lebanon while the latter is 24 times as large.

In fact, the arrival in Europe of refugees equal in number to those in Lebanon have upended the entire continent, causing tensions among its member states and even endangering its precious Schengen policy. Note that this is a continent with a population of nearly three-quarters of a billion inhabitants and corresponding infrastructure.

Also, unlike Jordan and Turkey, which have relatively uniform demographics, at risk is Lebanon's fragile sectarian balance, which the country has worked hard to maintain in order to preserve its stability.

Moreover, the Syrian crisis has wrought havoc on Lebanon's own political scene, precipitating greater discord in the country and exacerbating tensions between rival camps and between their supporters.

Lebanon is certainly in desperate need of monetary assistance to care for the refugees it is generously hosting, but this is a temporary measure. To truly help, Europe needs to find a permanent solution to the crisis in Syria, one that would allow these displaced souls to safely return to their homes.

Nadim Ladki
Editor in Chief - The Daily Star

May the world follow the lead of Pope Francis

Last September, Pope Francis called on the bishops of Europe to host refugees, «May every parish, every religious community, every monastery, every sanctuary of Europe, take in one family», he said, adding that he would begin with the Diocese of Rome, and that the two Vatican parishes will be welcoming two refugee families in the coming days.

Since the beginning of his mandate, the Pope is calling for kind welcoming of the immigrants who are fleeing their countries due to misery, war and religious or political persecution; and for granting them a second chance in the host country. This topic is actually a fundamental issue in his pontificate.

However, the Pope affirms in parallel the necessity of addressing the causes of immigration in the countries of origin and asks the immigrants to integrate in such a way that respects the laws of the host country.

Although the Pope has called on the Catholic church in the world, and through it all the Christian churches, to commit to the teachings of the Gospel in dealing with the refugees all over the world and to be merciful with them, he never stopped calling upon the European countries, divided over the influx of refugees, to find a «collective response» and a «fair distribution of the burdens» between them.

In fact, the Pope is implicitly indicting the International Community for causing this exodus as it has not worked on a fair distribution of wealth and did not exert huge efforts to provide semi-equal opportunities between nations and peoples. As a result, the poorest, the least fortunate, the most oppressed and the war victims, particularly the wars of others, have taken refuge in the safest countries and those that provide major future opportunities; they headed towards the United States, and more so to Europe, being closer to our Arab world, and that of the Muslim world, both of whom do not provide the people, except rarely, with human rights before equal opportunities.

It is about time for the international community to begin seeking serious and lasting solutions instead of throwing the refugees breadcrumbs and organizing conferences that cost a lot of money for studying the reasons, expecting the results and publishing them as recommendations that more than often are simply archived.

Ghassan Hajjar
Editor in Chief
An-Nahar newspaper

A World Worthy of Pity

The tragedy of the Syrian exodus is only getting deeper. This is implausible pain; arid misery; imprisoned horizon. Talking about displacement lacks the principle of human brotherhood. The world resorts to figures, people in it are mere numbers. It addresses vulnerability, fatigue and homelessness by deploying borders and shielding them. It bans «attacks» against tortured and displaced persons on «national territory» of countries that rejoice over «Human Rights» texts, with no desire to respect them.

The world has failed to provide the refugees with a permanent humanitarian solution. None of them went out willingly into the humanitarian open air. They were brought out by a war they did not want. Many people have tasted this bitterness; wars are the nature of human savagery. Peace is a short-lived opportunity. Still, countries muster their capacities for waging a war or responding to a war by an attack. Not a single country or international institution has exerted an effort to build fair and non-selective peace, and to embrace the victims of armed violence, famines, oppression and lack of horizon.

The composition of countries is horrible, isn't it? The structure of the state does not support a peace-protecting institution. All the governments have a ministry of war or one of defense; but there is no ministry of peace. And so, the world is engaged in wars and battles. Peace is protected by spears: to maintain peace, waging wars is a must. Isn't that horrible?

Between one war and another, or between one period of peace and another, humanity loses a big portion of its morals. It lives with a conscience that leans on objective causes. It justifies the pace of increasing armament, it builds a globalized economy with the power of commodities, and war is a commodity that is both popular and lucrative.

Woe to the weak, it has been said. They pay the price for the wars of the strong. And Man, who has nothing in this life but his belongings and dreams, loses them one after the other. He runs away, he travels by foot with a limp in his heart. He leaves, but never arrives. He is perceived as a stranger. He is welcomed in camps, police encamping him. He lives off of international charity while chewing on his misery and his pain and comforting his wounds with patience. What a poor world! It really deserves pity.

Nasri Sayegh
Deputy Editor in Chief
As-Safir newspaper

Going back to Syria is the refugees' ultimate dream... But what about security?

Sponsorship is a crippling condition... its terms are difficult for the poor, annoying for the affluent

Sanaa El Jack*

The year 2015 ended with a Lebanese «diplomatic» position warning against the settlement of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon. But those who are familiar with constitutional affairs consider that the word «settlement» by itself is devoid of any effect on the Lebanese state of affairs.

Settlement is prohibited in the Constitution by virtue of Paragraph «I» of its preamble, stipulating that the «Lebanese territory is one for all Lebanese... There shall be no segregation of the people on the basis of any type of belonging, and no fragmentation, partition, or settlement of non-Lebanese in Lebanon».

2015 had already started off with new terms for refugees, adding to their financial and moral burdens; the residence renewal fee for an individual above 15 years of age amounts to USD200, let alone the official paperwork fees required by the bureaucracy of the Lebanese administration for renewing the residence, which also cost around USD75. Between the beginning and end of last year, the tragedy of this new asylum remained. And while the sober-minded voices pinpointing the resulting crisis and its repercussions on the social and economic Lebanese welfare cannot be ignored, the same goes for the aggravation of the suffering of these refugees caused by the prolonged war back in their homeland.

But where is the Syrian opinion regarding what is being said about settlement, work and not returning? And what are the conditions of the Syrians currently residing in Lebanon due to the deteriorating situation in their countries?

Abdel Salam, a Syrian refugee living in the warehouse of an under construction commercial building in the «Jnah» area, in Beirut's southern suburb (Dahieh), says that the problem of the sponsor is the toughest yet in his grim situation.

He adds: «This is why we have made arrangements, and agreed on raising money among us to give it to the most capable of finding a steady job to secure a sponsor and pay for residence. Those who cannot do that, in addition to women, remain illegal».

Needless to say, Abdel Salam wants to return home. Who doesn't? He adds: «School and medical care are free back there. Here, I am living with my wife, five kids and nephew in a 30 m² room. I pay one hundred dollars a month. We are letting go off the power cut most of the times, but we buy drinking water».

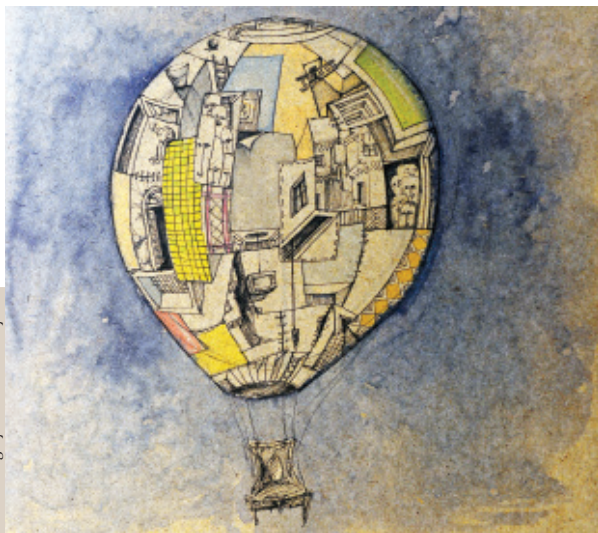
When asked why he did not migrate within Syria instead of enduring this suffering, he replied: «We tried to, we moved inside Syria, but the danger kept following us. Here we feel safe».

This is the case of the majority of Syrians who are poor and are seasonal workers. Security is their first concern. Securing an income that spares them poverty comes in second place, so they bitterly accept asylum. Their suffering shows by simply observing them in one of the General Security departments; they stand in queues, sometimes for hours on end, then go back, disappointed, only to return the next day and stand in queue to be able to finish their paperwork. Getting to the General Security queues is considered an advanced step compared to the hardship of finding a sponsor.

Mounzer, who has secured an income by working as a janitor in one of the eastern suburbs of Beirut for the last nine years, did not find someone to sponsor him. He does not understand why this procedure was imposed upon him. He used to travel between Lebanon and Syria with no restrictions. The current situation confused him and his stay is considered to be illegal. Since this law was issued, he is in a state of semi-forced stay and does not move outside of his working place.

He was once interrogated by a security checkpoint and claimed that his papers were being renewed. He «got away with it». But «one can only be lucky once».

For the time being, leaving Lebanon to return to Syria is



© Drawing by Mohamad Khayata

not an option for Mounzer. He says: «I have to stay here. Where would I go? I have three kids: two daughters who are attending a public school and a little boy whose turn is not up yet». He believes that the war won't end in Syria, so he sent after his family to move in with him a year ago. Mounzer has a house in his Syrian village; he has not seen it in almost four years. He is not sure of whether it still exists or has become rubble. He is drawn to security in Lebanon, even if sentenced to curfew. His sister lives in Tripoli but he cannot visit, and he certainly does not contemplate immigration at all. From here to Syria and from Syria to Lebanon. This is the map of his life.

The hardships of asylum are not limited to the poor, even when classified as residency, as put by a Syrian lady living in Beirut to spare her son the military conscription states; adding that her daughter is pursuing her medical studies in the American University of Beirut.

The lady, who prefers to be kept unknown, considers the high cost of living to be the worst concern; it is a concern uniting Lebanese and Syrians, who were forced to leave their country. She pays the electricity and water bills twice, in addition to the house rent amounting to USD1,100 monthly. She adds: «Despite all what is happening back home, prices in Damascus remain cheaper. The tough part is that our income is in Syrian Pounds and all our payments in Lebanon are in US dollars».

Her situation, as her related information indicate, suggest that she is well-off, or that she belongs to the relatively well-off middle class, even if she does not explicitly declare it. The fear of imposing military service upon her son is however the primary reason behind this forced displacement. She is considering returning to her Damascene home once she settles the exemption fees amounting to USD800, in a year and a half, as she points out.

She explains that her son does not want to stay in Lebanon or resort to immigration same as other young Syrians are doing, so he turned down an opportunity to travel to Germany. She adds that he is currently self-employed and is getting requests for performing some work, but the

amount he gets paid in return is not sufficient to cover half the cost of living in Lebanon.

She does not rule out returning to Damascus with her son once the military service issue is resolved, while her daughter lives in the student university dorms. She adds: «The situation in Damascus is much better than before; many people went back there from Lebanon, Egypt and Turkey».

Returning, then, is a top priority for this lady who dreams of ending the nightmare of the collapse of her social and economic security. While she thanks God for not having endured any embarrassments during her stay in Lebanon, she does not deny however the frustration bred by the formal procedures imposing new restrictions on the issue of residence. She explains that a Lebanese family friend is sponsoring her and her son, while the university is sponsoring her daughter. She also explains that the problem with the General Security is the lack of organization; Syrians are jostling like herds in its departments, they feel humiliated. One of them, upon inquiring several times about his papers, got slapped by a General Security officer. This is horrible.

The middle-class-Syrians do not object the Lebanese formalities. The problem lies in the implementation, as George Halabi, 70 years-old, puts it. He explains that he owns an apartment in Mansourieh (Mount Lebanon) and has lived there for more than 20 years. His daughter is married to a Lebanese. However, and a couple of times, he has found himself in difficult and humiliating situations due to the chaos in implementing those formalities. Things did not work out for him until his son-in-law sponsored him to obtain a yearly renewable residence permit.

One of the ladies who holds a 10-year French residence permit said she can enter Lebanon for a period of one month, after which she has to leave. So she needed her son-in-law to sponsor her in order to move easily between Beirut and Damascus, but she does not think of settling in Lebanon at all. She is pained by the scene of displaced Syrians at the borders. She says they should all go back and live in secure Syrian areas, because the humiliation of displacement is harder than war.

As for Omar, who also works as a janitor in Beirut, immigration is his one and only dream. He says: «Never have I imagined that one day I would end up like this. Not a single resident of the building I've been working in for the last ten years accepted to be my sponsor. They treated me as if I had a contagious disease, until a friend of mine, probably poorer than I am, bailed me out. We went more than four times to the General Security; we waited for hours to get the sponsorship paperwork done, while those who pull strings were in and out in minutes».

Omar does not want to go back to his village in Syria. He says: «My kids have no future there». He does not want to stay in Lebanon either. He is waiting to sort his situation and immigrate to a country that recognizes human rights, and does not humiliate those who are already doomed, as he angrily he says.

* Lebanese journalist and writer

Stories from Syria: Another kind of asylum!

Mohamad Chebaro*

In a café in Beirut, the capital, a group of Syria's «elite» meets periodically at a round table. They are accustomed to the rendez-vous, just as they are to the place; for them it is a collective «nostalgia», away from the reality of taking refuge in Lebanon, and away from the suffering. They remember some stories about Syria, and much more intimacy; they let their imagination wander in its streets, alleys and cities. Every Saturday at ten in the morning, the «group» meets. The faces change; some are new and some retreat. Over the last five years, many of those who have sat around this table, in this café, have left. Only few remain in Lebanon; for its proximity to the Syrian territory or in anticipation of the hope of leaving. They come from different cities in Syria, but what brings them together is not the suffering; they admit that in Lebanon, they are leading a good life, economically.

In these meetings, the topics mix up between politics, terrorism, the regime, «ISIS» and the opposition. During the last meeting, there was a lengthy talk over Lebanon, taking refuge in it and the suffering of the Syrians in the tents, on the border and the border crossings. All of those who have taken refuge in Lebanon, even those who are considered «elite» - with personal reserve regarding the term - and enjoy the minimum level of the economic ability to sufficiency, share one explicit feeling: Lebanon has failed in dealing with the Syrian crisis and in positively exploiting it in its favor.

Around this table is another face of the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. The scene seems very different from the Syrian suffering; there are no tents here, there are no queues that await little aid that sometimes comes and other times is cut off, pending funds from donor states and parties.

Among the present «elite» is a jewelry designer. As the military and war element first began entering the city of Aleppo, she decided early on to wind up her business there; especially that she was a prisoner of fear of any possible acts of looting. She quickly gathered all that she owns and moved towards the border between Syria and Turkey. She was able to enter the Turkish territory through one of the border points, after going through a long hardship to resolve the transfer of her property. She narrates the decision she took; this was not the first time she tells her story around this table. She asks those present to wait, apologizes for any repetitions and continues with her story: within few weeks, she decided to fly to Beirut and resume her business there. For her, the choice of Beirut was related to her ability to pick up with what she had started in Aleppo in another Arab city, as well as to private family matters. This repetition was to convey to those present that her presence in Lebanon had actually added to the country. She admits that the Syrian crisis has actually weighed on Lebanon, but in return, there are certain positive aspects to it. And from her personal conversation regarding her situation, she points out to the dozens of similar cases; from businessmen to traders and investors who have moved to Lebanon.



© Anwar Amro

Around the same table sits a Syrian filmmaker, in his professional beginnings. For him, the decision of moving to Beirut was final. As the Syrian crisis began, he expected the Lebanese capital to transform into an artistic and cultural asylum for the Syrians; and his expectations were right. According to him, a major shift took place at the Lebanese drama level in particular; attributable to the joint projects and to the Syrian expertise that found in Beirut a space in which they can practice the Syrian successes. His memory takes him to Syria, back to the school days, and he compares between the space of cultural freedom that is provided in Lebanon and that in Syria. Only the fields that are subject to the private sector, such as the field in which he works, have successfully achieved some advantages at the level of the Lebanese-Syrian cooperation. The discussions vary; they go back and forth between the economic and cultural factors; it is said that Lebanon has failed, through these factors, to transform the repercussions of the Syrian crisis into a positive element, keeping them as negative points. The conversations diverge. Two of those present work in the field of relief; they move regularly between Beirut and Turkey. The requirements of work have imposed their presence in Lebanon. They point out, in detail, to the positive repercussions on Lebanon in this field in particular, after this small country has turned into a center and a destination for a significant number of international institutions

and organizations working in this field. They excuse themselves before the meeting ends; they leave towards Bekaa to finish their work of carrying a few items of aid that have just arrived through one of the international institutions.

Even politically, and although those present always try not to delve into this kind of details, Lebanon has, for them, failed to exploit the Syrian crisis in its favor. After all that had taken place in Syria, politics has become their haunting nightmare. Dominating their conversations is a state of semi-surrender to the Syrian situation; they often draw a grim picture of their country's future, along with the lack of hope. One of those present (working in the field of studies) suggests that the Syrian situation has actually become a reality, while Lebanon is still capable of taking an initiative, if there ever is a will.

He quickly ends the subject. This table can only carry little hope; and they often try to stay positive. The meeting ends. Those sitting around the table start to leave before a friend, living in Beirut for the last three years and working in the field of trade, surprises them with the news of his departure, for good, the following week. The destination: France. The goal: a better tomorrow. They share some intimate moments, some hugs and kisses and agree that the next meeting would be a farewell meeting...

* Lebanese journalist and writer

Beirut and the ring-sale journey

Mohamad Hajj Hussein*

We all form, along with our ideas, an entity of preconceptions based on what the senses capture. The image of Beirut in the memory of all the Syrians who had the time to listen to and examine Lebanese art, who draw an almost real fantasy, that Beirut in particular is the road leading to the ring sale journey. I've always memorized the Lebanese plays by heart; every single word of them, to the point that I decided to escape from every «Rajeh»* that has gone too far in the country. In my memory, this name has become one face for thousands of murderers; I don't know their names and I don't know wherefrom all this evil grew in them, but I do know it is reaping years of terrorism in its other forms, in the face of ignorance, tears of poverty and tears of humiliation followed for the last two wars or more. Some of us fled farther than «Al Souane Mountains/ Jibal Al Souane,» some of us failed to cross a distance greater than a torture dungeon and a grave and some of us reached the place where our memory is crowded with images of «Nawatir Al Thalj» and «Shouyoukh Al Marajel,» just as they are in the plays that I have listened to. I arrived breathless; I have lost more and more breaths at every checkpoint before the Masnaa border crossing, and maybe even after it.

My twenty years prior to this misery might go in peace, pass silently. Some of us made the noise and the noise made them, taught them how to say no, before all this noise, to the silence of the lambs.

For years, I have been seeing a clear resemblance between myself and the inhabitants of this plot of land, years of killing similar to their death, one day. Their memory chokes on names of people deceased, missing, displaced and we carry a great amount of loss that we mutually share.

They are more familiar with sadness than we are; they express everything like we do, except in love. I don't know how I came from «Souhoul Al Dabab,» suspicious while walking among people's looks staring at «Rajeh». They think I carry the name. For them, all my people are «Rajeh» except for the one who was able to convince them that he's taken off the dress of evil, or did not wear it to begin with.

My hope for peace of soul disappeared every time I ran into someone convinced that there was no good in «Rajeh» and no good in whoever came from there, that place choking on sadness that leaked children and families fleeing the wind to the wind, to where the senior Mukhtar is, as well as some people who can understand the story of the wolf and sheep, with no prejudice.

I arrived [here] two years ago, aware of that I had to leave my dreams and search the streets and squares of Beirut for work. The quest drew me closer to the names and stones, and helped me meet great people who share my memory and present; their wishes resemble mine, and they have two identities, just like I do. These people and I fused until I believed that we share on this land here more than we did there; there where I had been looking for floccules of hope hidden in names from my memory. These names became the names of my present: Dora square, Barbir bridge, Achrafieh brings us together, the Hamra street that grows gets tired of our footsteps, theater stages on which stood all the names of the people who formed my memory of the place. Here is Beirut, Beirut for everyone. I became aware and certain that people are not alike, that our hunger is not their satiety and that a death from a past in our memory and theirs is not among them or from them. They have our worries, we have theirs. We became part of them and they became part of us. We have people who hate them and they have people who hate us. We share the soil, the wind and the water. We, like them, are scared of death, immigration and night watchmen. Their blood, that you carry in your heart, resembles you and resembles them. They lend us a helping hand and we lend them one, small hands that might not breathe life. However, after melting with the warmth of the streets and biting the bullet of sadness in its rooms, I became certain that every newcomer from «Souhoul Al Dabab» now knows that the veil that blocks our vision and theirs is merely expired packaged ideas, just as the idea of «our Rajeh» and «their Rajeh» always expires.

*Rajeh: A character in the play: «The Ring Salesman/Bayya' Al Khawatem» by the Rahbani Brothers, representing a lie invented by the Mukhtar to brag about fantasized heroic adventures. Rajeh soon appears in the role of the Ring Salesman/Bayya' Al Khawatem and undermines the attempts of some people to exploit the character and terrorize and vandalize the village.

* Syrian writer

I am the Stranger

Youssef Hajj Ali *

I am that girl standing at the traffic light in the rain, holding a bag too big for her so she can sell napkin boxes to cars driving by. I am the girl watching kids my age going to school everyday in a bus, hearing their peals of laughter and songs fill the morning air. I am the girl they watch and feel sorry for when their bus stops at the traffic light.

I am the one who carefully looks into their eyes and knows what they are thinking. I am the one who gazes at their colorful school uniforms, their meticulously tied braids and their pretty hair barrettes and remember my own uniform that the war had burnt. I am the one who envies them for their wool hats and their puffer jackets as my headscarf is drenched in the storm and my beautiful hair hiding underneath it becomes limp and flat.

I am the one who used to go to school just like them. I am the one who used to like the nice teacher, the big classroom and the wooden desks that I used to scribble on. I am the one whose friends have dispersed when the war broke out and the school was razed to the ground. I am the one who misses them all. I am the one who wishes she could close her eyes this moment and find herself with those kids on the school bus stopping at the traffic light.

I am the one whom the arts teacher once told that she would become an artist or an architect. I am the one who had believed the teacher. I am the one who had believed her.

I am the one who taps on car windows hoping to sell napkins as drivers rebuke me for no reason. I am the one who hears them cursing at me and those I love all day and part of the night. I am the one who hates this rain that is soaking me, the cold that is biting me, the sun that is burning me, and the exhaust pipe smoke that is gnawing at my chest; and I am the one who hates the sound of car horns now and forever.

I am the one who if she remains on the street the big bad gray wolf would come to eat her in a little.

I am the father who has fled with his wife and daughters to this country. I am the one who abandoned his house and livelihood fearing for their lives from predatory monsters. I am the one who did not find a warm house to give them in place of the home we left or a roof to keep them from the rain and cold. I am the one who is standing helpless before their demands that they used to be embarrassed of sharing with me, I am the man with the gray hair. I am the one wandering the streets in search of work –any work– that would help me provide for their needs and avoid asking strangers for aid.

I am the one who everyone turned down because my age hardly allows me to work. I am the one who stood confused and lost about what to do with the mass of hungry flesh. I am the one the world closed the door in his face and who refused to stretch his hand out to people and would not ask for anything because I have never and will never be able to do this.

I am the one who stood on a rusty metal chair, shaking on its four legs. I am the one who tied the rope tightly to the ceiling

and tied a noose around my neck. I am the one who lit a cigarette with whose smoke I puffed all the worries that had piled in my heart. I am the one who flicked the butt to the ground and dispelled along with it all my faith in finding justice in this world. I am the one who pushed the chair with my foot and was left hanging alone from the ceiling.

I am the young man who was forced to leave university. I am the one who had one year left to his graduation with a dentistry degree. I am the one who lost most of my family in one explosive moment. I am the one who now fears the scalpel and hates blood because of all the blood I have seen and all the blood that had touched me. I am the one who arrived in this country without official papers. I am the one who took a liking to the people of this country although they were wary of me and my dialect.

I am the one who they refused to rent a single room to because I was a single young man. I am the one who they viewed as an intruder, agent and terrorist.

I am the one who searched for a smuggler

and I am the one who decided with conviction to risk my life to get to Europe in search of human rights I had lost in my own country and in yours.

I am the one who will put on a life vest and set from this coast to new lands. I am the one who has never learned to swim.

I am the one who the Mediterranean swallowed and whose waves carried me to be buried with others like me in the strangers' cemetery.

I am the mother who covered her belly with a wool blanket and envied the child sleeping inside her for the warmth he enjoyed. I am the one who looked at her fingers to find them cracked and blue from the bitter cold. I am the one they kept asking why I got pregnant when my body in not able to make milk? I am the one they asked why I was bringing a child to this world while I was living in a tent?

I am the one who suffered from infertility for nine years and did not conceive until I had found myself in these conditions. I am the one who panicked when my period was late and thought that I would never be able to conceive again. I am the one who could

not believe the news of my pregnancy and thought that the visiting physician at the camp was consoling me and lifting my spirits. I am the one who saw a different world in the eyes of the fetus that was bathing inside me.

I am the one who despite the war, despite the pain, and despite the suffering saw a ray of hope in my heart that I had dreamt of for years. I am the one who imagined baby clothes in blue and pink. I am the one who dreamt of a stroller to push and a child laughing and calling me by the sweetest word. I am the one who had waited for this word for a decade, and prayed and went to sleep in tears so that the heavens would hear me and finally they responded to my calls and anticipation.

I am the one whose fetus died of sorrow before being born. I am the one who would never again know motherhood.

(N.B.: Any resemblance of the characters of these stories to real life events is a realistic and intended resemblance.)

* Head of the social section at Al-Araby Al-Jadeed newspaper



Towards a professional and ethical approach The News Coverage of the Displaced Syrians in the Lebanese Media

Dr. Mahmoud Tarabay*

The Syrian crisis has left many repercussions on Lebanon on all social, economic, humanitarian and educational aspects, as Lebanon was the most neighboring country to be affected by the Syrian crisis through waves of Syrian exodus to Lebanon and whose pace was directly related to the situation in Syria.

Faced with this recent reality, the topics of life and living associated with the displaced Syrians in Lebanon since the beginning of the Syrian crisis were imposed upon the agenda of the Lebanese print, broadcast and online media; the coverage of those topics has become part of the daily work of the journalists. The coverage varied between daily news stories, features and editorials looking beyond the daily events. This has prompted the Lebanese media to keep pace with those consequences, in their every detail, since they have become part of the details of the everyday life in Lebanon.

This leads us to raise questions related to news coverage of the topic of the displaced Syrians in the various Lebanese media; we start with media coverage of the topics and the ethics of media coverage, finishing with some conclusions regarding news coverage of the displaced Syrians issue in Lebanon.

Notes on Media Coverage Process

Media scholars define news coverage as the process of obtaining information and details related to a specific event, briefing its causes, the place of the incident, the names of the participants therein, how and when it occurred and other information that render the event worthy of being published.

And if the subject of the displaced Syrians in Lebanon - since the beginning of the war in Syria, which has led to successive waves of displacement into the Lebanese regions - is the event that requires obtaining information and details related thereto, then the news coverage of this issue has been, over the past years, the daily bread of the Lebanese, Arab and foreign media. At the level of local media, the subject of displaced Syrians has often come before other local issues given the impact it has left on the Lebanese scene and the presence of large numbers of displaced people compared with the number of Lebanese citizens; the ratio of which has exceeded the internationally applicable ratios, as indicated by international organizations. In a report issued by the Peace Building for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon Project-UNDP, which includes a study by Maharat Foundation (2015) on

«Monitoring Racism in the Lebanese Media: the Representations of the «Syrian» and «Palestinian» in the News Coverage,» it appeared that the topic of the Syrian displacement is predominant on the news coverage as it received 75% of the main coverage of the Lebanese newspapers during the monitoring and analysis period (from February 5 to 25, 2015) given the social, political and security issues that the Syrian displacement raises.

Although the subject of the displaced Syrians has maintained a significant presence at a daily pace in the Lebanese media, it is also noted that the volume and type of coverage of the issue of the displaced Syrians in Lebanon varied depending on factors linked to the daily journalistic work cycle and the pace of the numerous news. The news coverage focused on the following matters:

- 1- The weather and climate conditions and their effects on the displaced; the local newspapers and the Lebanese channels have published and broadcasted reports over the conditions of the Syrians in the Bekaa camps during blizzards and displaced people's lack of access to shelter and heating means;
- 2 - The health conditions of the displaced Syrians, whether regarding the outbreak

of diseases or the difficulty in receiving treatment;

3- The living conditions with the retreat in aids from the international organizations and donor states;

4- The educational conditions of the children of the displaced Syrians and their impact on public education in Lebanon;

5- The inspection visits by representatives of international entities in Lebanon and meeting with the officials and ministers concerned with the file of the Syrian displacement in Lebanon;

6- The inspection visits by foreign officials to the displaced persons camps in the Beqaa or public schools in Bourj Hammoud and other areas, to take a closer look at the situation of the displaced persons;

7- The conferences supporting the displaced Syrians in Lebanon and the neighboring countries hosting the displaced, held in Beirut, Kuwait and other countries.

If we try to shift from public to private, we notice that the Lebanese media coverage came either as introductory focuses on obtaining related details and information, or as reports, occurring after the event takes places, and follow ups, addressing new results or developments. This is manifest when following the media materials that

are being published or broadcast; the Lebanese newspapers have allocated their pages to the subject of the displaced Syrians, and the TV news bulletins of all the Lebanese channels extensively covered the issue through the reports of their on-the-ground correspondents across the Lebanese territories.

In terms of content, it was predominantly based on neutral coverage where only facts were provided, with information explaining what is being presented along with the facts. In some cases, the coverage was somehow biased; focus was on a particular aspect of the story, and certain facts were being deleted, overused or distorted.

And according to the above-mentioned report «Monitoring Racism in the Lebanese Media: the Representations of the «Syrian» and «Palestinian» in the News Coverage,» the media tone appearing in the Lebanese press varied during the monitoring period; the neutral tone scored the highest percentage of 49%, followed by the negative tone at 27% of the coverage related to security news such as raids, security measures and coverage of crimes committed by Syrians, and the positive tone at 24% in news coverage addressing subjects of securing aid for the displaced and securing housing and schools for the children of the displaced, as well as the subject of disasters and accidents suffered by the displaced people in the times of hardship.

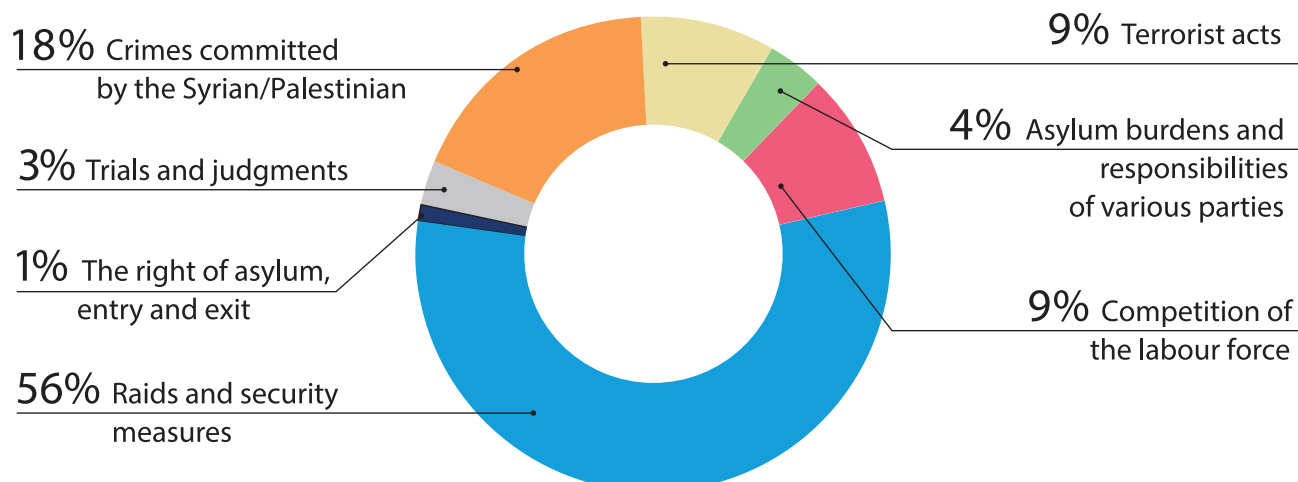
Ethics of Coverage

Section three of the «Monitoring Racism in the Lebanese Media: the Representations of the «Syrian» and «Palestinian» in the News Coverage» Report referred to the topic of Lebanese media and racism. An extensive sample of the media material published in the newspapers, on online sites or broadcasted on Radio or TV channels in Lebanon, was analyzed. The said report cited several headlines carrying connotations that suggest racism, such as the use of the feelings of fear and anxiety of the other where the displaced Syrians have become a threat to the national identity, a burden upon the state and a cause for the high rate of crimes, the circle of hatred and words of racism, such as in designating the other, the rhetoric of numbers and the use of war metaphors like «ticking time bombs». These references to the subject of racism in

The main topics in the press coverage of the Syrian and Palestinian issues with a negative tone.

Sample of 72 observed articles.

Chart 8.



the Lebanese media against the displaced Syrians pull us back to part of what came in the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon (launched by the UNDP Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon) and that can guide us to address the ethics of media coverage of displaced Syrians in Lebanon.

In this regard, several matters, inter alia, are to be considered:

1- The commitment of the Lebanese media institutions to rejecting the principles of racial discrimination, regarding the displaced Syrians issue, and refraining, directly or indirectly, from challenging the dignity of people.

2- The commitment of the Lebanese media institutions to addressing the subject of

hate speech with professionalism and social responsibility.

3- The commitment to accuracy and objectivity in drafting, editing and disseminating information, documents, images and scenes related to the displaced Syrians.

4- The commitment to avoid mistakes or the use of the vocabulary of libel and slander, defamation and discrimination in matters related to the subject of the displaced Syrians.

Some conclusions

Based on what has been already addressed, some conclusions regarding the subject of news coverage of the displaced Syrians in Lebanon can be stated.

At the professional level, the news coverage of the subject of the displaced Syrians in Lebanon was comprehensive in addressing all aspects of the subject. In this context, the field follow-ups were comprehensible through the work of the reporters and correspondents and the adequate coverage of what was taking place on the event site. The neutral and positive tone was predominant in the media coverage, while observing some negative coverage in some media institutions. More than often, the focus of news coverage revolved around the humanitarian aspect through conveying the suffering of the displaced Syrians and the media's attempt at contributing to the provision of assistance through the display of the suffering.

At the ethics level, the news coverage of the displaced Syrians in Lebanon was conducted according to professional and ethical standards in general. However, the results noted in the above-mentioned report draw attention to that part of the news coverage of the displaced Syrians in Lebanon took a racist turn. This makes it imperative for the media to approach the topic in accordance with the standards set out in the Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon. Finally, and facing a crisis of this magnitude in Lebanon, the Lebanese media institutions acted more than often professional under such difficult circumstances.

** Lebanese media professor*

The Displaced Syrians as Seen by the Media

Maytham Kassir*

Her name was Rim. She was ten years old and lived in an informal settlement in West Bekaa. She remembers Syria very well; she is courageous and dreams of becoming a journalist. She stood there waiting for the journalist to ask her the question so that she answers how she hates everything here. She hates living in a camp, living away from her country Syria. She realizes her parents' suffering to offer her the slightest of happiness. They don't have money and are surrounded in their camp. If her father leaves, he might not come back because his stay is illegal. If her mother goes out she might not be able to buy her gifts because they are expensive or because she might be harassed. Furthermore, Syrians are subject to curfew after a certain hour. Rim, the ten-year-old girl, knows all of this. She also realizes someone is trying to grant her a bit of joy, despite everything. However, she does not want any of this. She wants to be back in Syria.

She said all this, then took the microphone and asked her friend the same question: Are you happy today? Her friend hesitated to reply. Rim told her: Don't be afraid. Your words will not go on TV... Just tell me what's in your heart.

Since Syrians started their exodus to Lebanon to flee death surrounding them in their country where violence was continuously expanding, they have been the focus of media attention. From the discussion of whether they were displaced or refugees, to their number and needs, passing through how to accommodate them and control their entrance process to Lebanon, then restricting their movement, as well as the stereotypes they received, the allegations about how they negatively affect their host communities, even linking their presence in Lebanon to any minor or major problems Lebanon is facing. Media has contributed to showcasing all of this, at times consecrating it, and at others dissipating and fighting it. At the same time, this controversy created a



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somewhat complex relationship between those people and media in general. It is a prolonged crisis; still, the Syrian refugees were not able to get acquainted with the presence of these creatures around them. They had no privacy left in this temporary life, in light of the raids of those looking for a scoop here and there.

His name is Alaa. He works as a flower salesman. He fled with his family from Aleppo. His father does not work, and he might be deprived from the assistance that is slowly fading. Every day, he has to bring back no less than sixty dollars, or else a punishment will be awaiting him. Alaa won't let you offend his father; he loves him and is aware that he has to push him to work. He remembers how four years ago, his illiterate father would insist that his mother makes sure Alaa had finished his homework before going to bed. Today however, they no longer have a house. Rent is expensive in Beirut, and going back to Syria is not an option in the near future; that's why Alaa's job is temporary, just as life in Lebanon is.

In a rest house on Corniche Raouche, Alaa ponders the jet skiers as they pass underneath the rock. He turns to me and asks: how many roses do I have to sell to own one of these Jet Skis?

In the beginning, they thought we (journalists) might be a means to ease their suffering that kept escalating, year after year, in the absence of ways to alleviate it. At the same time, fear always accompanied any contact between them and anyone wearing a journalist tag. This has made trust an essential key to break this barrier, a key that Syrians always consider if the person is worthy of holding it for a short period or not. Many questions cross their minds: Why would I tell you my story? Do you have the capability of finding the solution? What will happen to me after you publish

what I am going to tell you? How can I make sure that what you are trying to reassure me with is true? How will you use my story afterwards? Will I regret it? Will you ask about me after I give you what you need for your report?

Her husband was arrested while they were fleeing the countryside of Homs. She was pregnant with her fifth child, who was born in Lebanon; a brother to four siblings whose mother is suffering today. They live in an abandoned underground compound in the South; as though they were really buried. The relief authorities have not visited them for the last two years. When asked about her biggest suffering, she says that her children need medical care, and «the physicians here abuse them. They note down their names in the international organizations' records, and do not give us the required medication. They think we don't know what they are doing. They want to turn our lives into living hell. We get no sunshine, no clean water and no affordable food. I swear that death under the bombs is kinder than what we are enduring here.» She becomes quiet all of a sudden, then she says: «Please don't expose my face. I am afraid of no one, but it is my children that I fear for.»

Many experiences have made Syrians feel that these creatures who go by the name of journalists do not see them as people in the first place. With time, they have come to prefer aching in silence over telling us about their suffering; a suffering they are now convinced we are incapable of easing or impacting. Although sometimes there is a slight hope for a small number whose conditions have improved, but sometimes, while conversing with them, I worry that they might be right. Their voice often go with the wind.

** Lebanese journalist*

Refugees and Citizens United by a Tragedy Preceding the War

Children with disabilities in an environment that disregards their needs

Imadeddine Raef*

The Syrian girl Y.D. (13) lives in a tent with eight other members of her family who are not registered on the lists of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the fact that deprives them of the basic assistance on the one hand and refugee status on the other. The family, living in Younine camp in the Beqaa where no one in her family is productive economically, is hunger stricken. As a consequence, her sister M.D. suffers malnutrition. Yasmine suffers severe spine curvature that causes her constant pain and mobility difficulties. She used to be able to stand and walk on her feet to perform domestic chores that were required of her, the fact that exacerbated the curvature in her back. In addition to her stepmother's mistreatment and verbal abuse, her father prevented her from leaving the tent for «social» reasons, which led to her complete isolation in a corner of the tent, urinary incontinence and shame from her disability.

During a camp field visit, one of the social workers from the «Enabling persons with disabilities to deal with the Syrian crisis project» implemented by the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union in the Beqaa got to meet the girl. She was referred to one of the international organizations programs to provide her with a medical back brace. The device, however, and after obtaining it, caused her additional pain and turned out to be unsuitable for her. After referring Y. D. again to physical therapy sessions, some progressive improvement was observed but the medical examination revealed that she was in need of prompt intervention. In addition to the brace, she needed an urgent surgical operation without which it is believed she would not be able to walk again. If her disability was to exacerbate, will she be able to be mobile in a wheelchair around the camp? Can the refugee family change its place of residence? And is the surrounding public space for both citizens and refugees and the families that are able to rent apartments any better for children with disabilities?

Figures and needs

The case of Y. D. is one of 306 cases observed by the project implemented by the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union; the project is involved with 284 of these cases. The project, in its statistical and relief aspects, is an urgent need for a region that houses a very large number of refugees in the absence of scientific statistics. The figures available from UNHCR for the Hermel and Beqaa districts in general reveal the registration of 9,342 persons with disabilities distributed according to type of disability as follows: visual impairment with 1,362 persons (503 females and 859 males), mobility impairment with 1289 persons (621 females and 1,271 males), mental disabilities with 816 persons (346 females and 470 males), auditory and verbal impairments with 1,602 persons (640 females and 962 males), other disabilities

with 3,670 persons (1,257 females and 2,413 males). As a result, around 40 percent of refugees with disabilities who have obtained a UNHCR registration card have no specified disability either as a result of absence of a specialized form on the one hand or the narrow local classification of disabilities compared to classifications adopted worldwide in an era following the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Therefore, the no way to reach refugees with disabilities, particularly the children, is by looking for them in refugee camps and centers before determining the needs and intervention possibilities to fulfill their needs. Research has revealed that most of them live in and around Baalbek, Majdel Anjar, Bar Elias and Marj (around 90 percent) while the remaining percentage is spread over the towns of Ali Annahri, Brital, Gazza, Joub Jannine, Hermel, Iaat, Shmustar, Taalbaya, Taanayel and Temnine.

It is evident that the infrastructure in those areas, as in the rest of Lebanon, lacks any architectural amenities that heed the needs of people with disabilities either at its minimum level as provided by section four of the law 220/2000 on the rights of persons with disabilities or in accordance with the comprehensive system imposed by the CRPD and its optional protocol that the Lebanese Parliament has not ratified to this day, nine years after it has been issued. According to the coordinator Samar Tufayli of the «Enabling persons with disabilities to deal with the Syrian crisis project» implemented by the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union, «If the infrastructure for public and private use in towns and cities is that way, how could it be otherwise in the refugee camps that virtually don't have any amenities to aid the mobility of people with disabilities?» Syrians with disabilities have fled to an environment already in a crisis, which does not meet the basic needs of its citizens with disabilities and where legislation on the urgent services is

applied arbitrarily, as with the medical and hospital care services where difficulties in obtaining prosthetics and medical devices persist. Moreover, most of the articles of the law 220/2000 relating to educational integration, education, sports, recreation, housing and decent employment have not been applied for 16 years.

Hostages of the place

The project figures show that out of 284 refugees, 161 children were subject to intervention in Middle and North Beqaa (89 percent under the age of 15, 37 percent females), where children make up 57 percent of refugees and are distributed among the four impairment categories (auditory and verbal, visual, mobility and mental), as well as 19 cases of multiple impairments. Moreover, 75 percent of these children live in refugee tents while the rest live in rented apartments or buildings that lack the basic architectural amenities for people with mobility, visual or mental impairments. Thus, they are in fact the hostages of a place that does not heed their needs as well as the needs imposed by displacement on the one hand and their health condition on the other. Nevertheless, when the intervention with a child with disabilities involves treatment and medical devices, he cannot be isolated from the rest of the children, refugees or other. In spite of the great difficulty of doing so, and according to Tufayli, the project has worked to prevent the isolation of refugee children with disabilities in parallel with working with Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian and Iraqi children, i.e. four times the number of Syrian children with disabilities, as part of the Emergency Project rehabilitative therapies section that includes physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy and medical devices.

Accurate information has been collected regarding the need of people with disabilities through field assessments and referrals by associations and other parties.

Agreements have been concluded with specialists and the action team has been trained on the standards of referral for each type of therapy and the procedures in place have been organized for each type for best results in the follow up on the progress of each case in addition to equipping the necessary clinics and the mobile clinic. Thus, refugee children have become a part of integrated work that goes beyond relief and therapy to integration in training and recreational activities. For that purpose, workers in most relief associations and organizations active in the Beqaa had to be trained on how to deal with individuals with disabilities. In addition, the referral system has been activated to respond to different needs that exceed the project's capacity relating to mobility aids, health and medical treatments and legal assistance (227 persons have been referred to date and they are being followed up to ensure they receive the required service).

The social and psychological support department has worked on implementing external social activities and social and various psychological support activities for refugees and residents alike in addition to recreational activities for children to help them integrate in the local environment. This was preceded by empowering and training the action team and a team of volunteers who would be carrying out the activities, with special focus on children and adolescents, child protection standards in emergencies, child development stages, communication, providing moral support to a child and his family, disability and integration, and violence survivor care. The social and psychological reality has been assessed in target areas with the help of a rigorous questionnaire (emotional, psychological, social and behavioral) and data analyzed before drafting an action plan.

Difficulties are mainly related to dealing with the society's received view of children with disabilities and the insistence of some

families on hiding them from society, especially if they are females. This situation subjects female children or adolescents to double discrimination for being a female and a person with a disability, the fact that exacerbates their psychological and behavioral condition. The state of being a refugee and its harsh conditions contribute to the denial of females of their basic rights, often manifested in preventing them from leaving refugee tents in families with many girls in fear that their disability would affect their sisters' «lot» in marriage. Perhaps the low percentage (37%) of access to these females is an indication of this discrimination. Discrimination has been observed more than once through the Observatory on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and in high percentages in Lebanese regions regardless of the family income or living standard; so how can the situation be otherwise for females living in refugee tents?

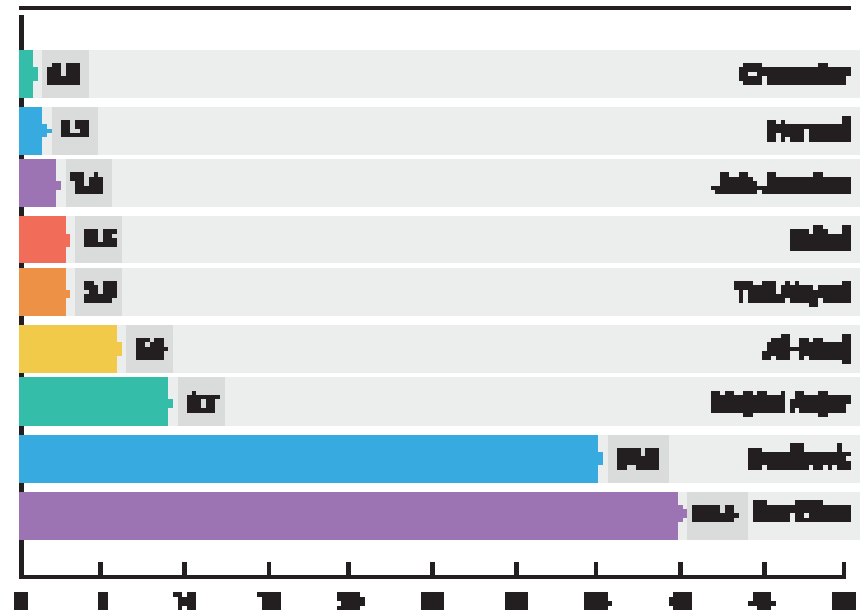
An outcry in the wilderness

Although Lebanon has not ratified the international convention that provides the organizations of disabled people with mechanisms for monitoring its proper application, these organizations have found ways of voicing their issues to the International Organization. They have drafted a shadow report submitted to the UN-High Commissioner for Human Rights in the framework of a periodic review on Lebanon's compliance with its obligations relating to the rights of persons with disabilities, or what is called the Universal Periodic Report (UPR), coinciding with Lebanon's official presentation of its report in early November 2015 in Geneva. The report was drafted by the Lebanese Coalition of Organizations of Disabled People and the Lebanese Disability Forum and presented by the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union as the executive party. It guarantees the rights of Syrian refugees with disabilities and demands their inclusion in the services provided by the law 220/2000 and the international convention. This report, whose recommendations were presented in Beirut last December upon the invitation of the Arab Network for NGOs, notes that the «UNHCR form is not specialized, does not monitor the type and degree of disability and largely depends on the descriptions of refugees (on the disability and needs) and not on the observations of trained specialists.» Regarding education, «refugee children with disabilities are deprived of alternative education programs within the arbitrary form of official and contractual education services provided in areas with refugees as a result of the absence of appropriate equipment, an adapted curriculum and trained educational staff.» In addition, in health and rehabilitation, «the budgets that cover medical care, hospitalization and treatment of chronic and terminal diseases have been gradually reduced to a minimum over the past year and the periodic reports did not note any

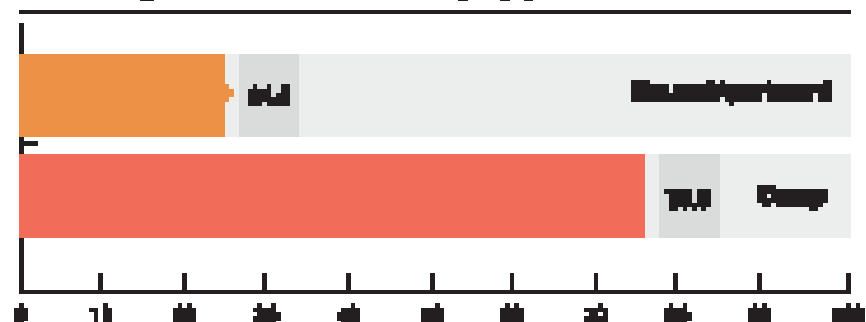
specialized rehabilitative works for people with disabilities.» When it comes to the right to work, «refugees are deprived of work and rely on the financial and in-kind assistance offered by donors.» «Most refugees with disabilities live in arbitrary camps that lack architectural amenities. They are hostages of improvised shelter centers or camps that lack the lowest standards of health and safety.» Organizations for the disabled have called for «determining the degree and type of disability and the additional needs of refugees with disabilities through a single specialized form and ensuring the access and participation of refugee children with disabilities in alternative educational programs through adapting the curricula gradually from the lowest to the highest classes.» Moreover, «refugees with disabilities should be considered as a real priority in ensuring their right of access to medical centers contracted by UNHCR and provision of appropriate therapy for them» in addition to «rehabilitating refugees with disabilities in specialized programs, especially those with war-caused disabilities.» They have also called for «equipping refugee centers according to a mechanism of mobile architectural equipment to ensure their equal access to services with non-disabled refugees.» Lebanese human rights organizations are looking forward to March 2016, the date of the 24th session of the Human Rights Council at the United Nations and call upon the Lebanese government to ratify all the 219 human rights recommendations that have been noted in writing and orally during the UPR as it constitutes the minimum required standards and anything less cannot be accepted. Time is going by and the current Lebanese government, like its predecessors since the adoption of the «Taif» Agreement, disregards the application of relevant local and international legislation, thereby making the calls of human rights organizations an outcry in the wilderness. The demands for equal rights among refugees on the one hand, and between refugees and citizens on the other hand, face a hostile environment and a hostile human rights reasoning that continues to confine children with disabilities to the medical and charitable models and regards them as service recipients and not as human beings with the right to full participation in public life. Therefore, society has to remove barriers to their integration. Refugee children with disabilities are the most marginalized and excluded categories, along with women with disabilities and elderly people, and the programs that work with them require a lot of elements of perseverance and continuity for the accumulation of efforts and skills with the hope that a fifth year would not go by without the refugees returning to their homes.

*Lebanese journalist and researcher in human rights issues in Lebanon and the Arab world

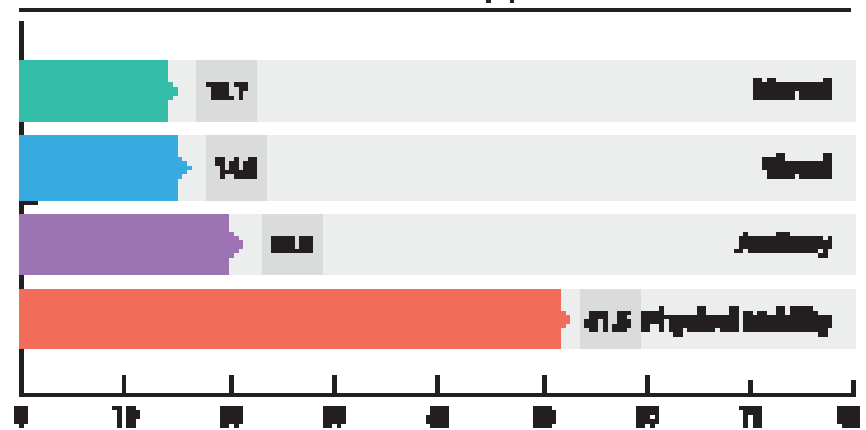
Distribution of disabled children according to the zones of refuge in Beqaa (%)



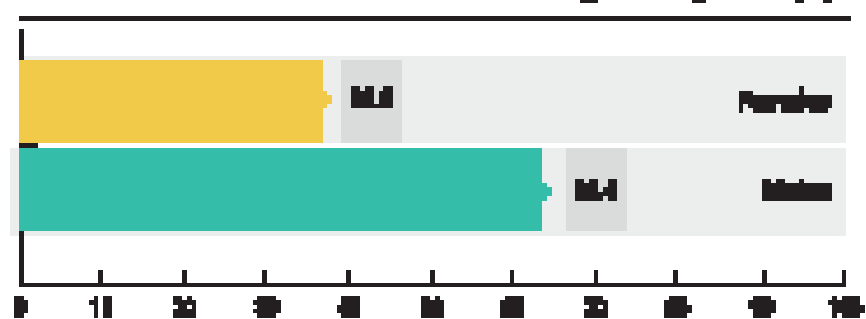
Distribution of disabled children according to the location of refuge (%)



Distribution of refugee children according to the type of disability (%)



Distribution of disabled children according to the gender (%)



Report from the 'Building peace and stability in Lebanon' project implemented by the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union (LPHU) in Beirut, Tyre and Herat

Chronicles of Syrian Misery

Badia Fahs*

The inhabitants of the Beqaa do not call the people living in Syrian camps refugees. The Syrians in the Beqaa are displaced, i.e. people displaced as a result of war from one place to another within the borders of their homeland. For most of the displaced, coming to the Beqaa was for them, prior to the Syrian crisis, a daily outing, as were the Beqaa inhabitants' visits to Syria.

Syrian camps in the Beqaa precede the crisis. Syrian workers of the valley have been residing there since the Lebanese decided they were above working their own land and found an alternative in the Syrians' poverty and privation.

Following the crisis, the patch of camps in the Beqaa expanded and the number of displaced there exceeded that of its inhabitants. The tents that have sprouted in every corner there are almost competing with its agricultural seasons.

In one of the camps in Bar Elias, the landowner has substituted the cultivation of potatoes with cultivating tents since the fee he receives from the «[United] Nations» is fixed, guaranteed and with no losses; the season of displacement is plentiful, the tent is rented at a hundred dollars, and each tent put up next to another is an auspicious sign of the continuing crisis.

Even displacement has been soaked in the social classes system. There are misery camps and «elite» camps like the one Angelina Jolie was taken to, explains the miserable displaced woman. «By God it's not envy, they have rooms and not tents, with walls, ceilings and doors. They have nice bathrooms and a school for children,» she adds.

In the misery camps, the tents are playgrounds for wind in the winter. When it snows heavily, they come crashing on the heads of their residents, and during the summer they turn into solar energy batteries. Solidarity delegations do not visit them.



When Oum Awwad and residents from her neighborhood arrived in the Beqaa, they were offered «aid» and a tent was set up for each family. On the piece of land that they had taken as a temporary homeland, on its border, there was a small room in concrete, which appeared to have been used as a toolshed. Everyone agreed that Oum Awwad would stay there given her age and the pains that the frost of the Beqaa triggers in her bones. But she wishes she had not moved into it, she says wryly, as the room turns into a mice and rats den after dark. In the beginning, she stuffed her windows with old rags and pots, shut her door with the bed springs she had found in the nearby dump and wrapped it in sheets. But before break of dawn, the rodents were back on all the barricades, having their fun in the room, dragging spoons and cups and messing with the food leftovers. Over time, Oum Awwad got to know her «guests» and the «guests» got used to her too. She now sleeps and the rodents awaken, scurrying around, sniffing her feet and clothes, and then leaving her alone.



Salama is not just a woman. Salama is a homeland, a people, a land, a harvest and life. She embodies the phrase «no despair in life» with her smile that never fades, her optimism that has no reason, her positive energy that she inspires in you when she takes you by the hand around the corners of the life at the camp, a life she organized and ordered with rules, excellently and fairly.

Here's a corner for making «quilts». She gathers the remains of old, torn wool cardigans and sews them to make blankets that she distributes to those in need around the camp. Then there is a corner for making bread, with a stove, a saj top, a cart, yeast for the dough, and piles of tinder and wood for the stove. It exudes the aroma of fresh bread all day long. «Bread by turn» is a daily program shared by the tent-wives. And they are real homemakers because they get up every morning to make life out of nothing. There is a corner for goats and chickens with a corral and a pen that decorate the edge of the camp and make living there a luxury. This is not something to be taken for granted when you are homeless and you get a glass of fresh milk every morning or two eggs for breakfast. It is nice when tragedy takes a break for a moment and life regains a taste of normality.

Salama is annoyed with the Lebanese minister who accused the displaced of exacerbating the garbage crisis. She responds, «We barely get our fill, the hungry do not leave garbage, garbage is sometimes their food.»



Nothing torments me at the camp as the cold, says the little rascal, I can take hunger and alienation, live without school and toys, but I can't take the cold.

In Syria, I used to love snow. I used to think it was a holiday for children. I would long to touch it and play on its white surface. I never knew that it was this cold and that its brightness would make our days this dark, and our lips blue, and our noses red and our hearts stop. I was wrong to think that I loved it.

Snow makes me feel helpless, that my life is pathetic, that I need a lot of coats, cardigans, wool socks and boots, which my parents cannot afford at the moment.

The aid that we brought to the camp that day was three boxes of winter boots for children. The camp shaweesh («superintendent») called the children of the camp and asked them to organize themselves in three rows. The child comes up to us and we write down his/her name, age and shoe size. We give him/her his/her shoe, sometimes along with a kiss, wink or a smile. He/she puts it on right away and runs back to his/her tent.

The little rascal stood before me. She asked to pick the pair of shoes herself. It struck me that she did not put on the shoes right away like the rest of the children, but rather put it under her arm and walked away. I resumed my work and I saw her standing in the third row, looking away so I would not see her. I went up to her and she burst into tears before I had even uttered a word. I took her to the side telling her off. She was sobbing and with a breaking voice said, «I want another pair, bigger than the one I took. I got one for this winter today. Who guarantees that I would get another pair next winter? Maybe you won't come back again. Maybe you'll forget us. But the cold won't forget us.»

My home in Hauran is the best in the world – a large room with two small rooms adjoining it, like two little girls cuddling to their mother and a wide yard nestling them from all sides. Feelings of contentment and satisfaction thrived inside its walls from the never-subiding voices of my sisters, the smell of fresh produce that my father would toss in the doorway every afternoon and the back and forth movement of my mother, full of life, like a breath of life in the body of a fetus.

Every time I retire to my dark room here, I am overwhelmed with a longing for the warmth of its walls and floors, for the feel of its wooden doors and old windows, for the bitter orange spheres that light up the shadows of the yard like stars in a summer sky, for the babbling water in the small pond in the middle of the yard, when my mother would forget the tap running and my grandmother would get up, dragging her feet to close it, cursing neglectful beings.

Why did I flee? My father was a wheat farmer and I do not know why his hard work only made us poorer. The revolution was for him a place to vent his helplessness and our hunger. He went with those who took to the streets. My mother did not stop him – she was even more enthusiastic than him. Many days had passed since the first demonstration when night visitors came by and dragged him from right before our eyes. They returned him days later in a white bag, a bloated body with severed head and limbs. We buried him right away and fled.

I clean homes for a living. There is something of an intimacy that has developed between me and the doors that I knock every morning. Perhaps because I am like them chopped off from a tree; like them I master the art of waiting silently on thresholds. The homes I go to make me sad. The warm breezes that blow in them, the mingling voices of children, mothers and fathers, especially in the mornings, the smell of laundry, cooking and the ringing of spoons in teacups, they all remind me how displaced and alienated I am.

It has been four years that I am here. I think they are enough for me to lose the ability to find the right answers to why I am displaced. I dream of returning to my country and I also dream that those that have gone there would also return to their countries. Perhaps I am here because they are there. I wish I had some courage to stand up to those who grumble at my accent and my skin color and say to them, «If you go back, we go back.»



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Goodbye, Beirut: Syria's war through the looking glass

Serene Assir*

This story is set in Beirut, during the period when Syria's revolt was painfully morphing into a multi-front war that would end up killing over a quarter of a million people and forcing half the population to flee their homes.

The war isn't over, but that time is gone. The conflict, which had already turned regional, has arguably gone global now, with Islamic State launching murderous attacks in Paris and California, and regime backer Russia joining a cacophony of countries bombing parts of Syria.

Numerous rounds of peace talks have so far failed, but as I write an unprecedented ceasefire that came into force on February 27 allowed protesters to return to the streets of opposition-held areas, battered by years of bombardment, to call for the fall of the regime. With millions have been displaced, and thousands of homes and livelihoods destroyed, Syrians are able for the first time to breathe at least, as the internationalized conflict that holds them hostage takes a pause.

But let's rewind for a minute, and talk about love. Yes, you read that right.

My fiancé Mohammad Ghannam and I had only known each other a few months when we left Beirut together in March 2015. I knew I was taking a risk, but to me it just felt right. I was madly in love with the Palestinian-Syrian journalist. He was everything I ever dreamt of: he had long hair, a beautiful sparkle in his big brown eyes, a fabulous sense of humor, a sensitive soul, and he loved to party.

To him, there were few options but to leave.

He had endured over a year of jail in Syria, including several months of torture, after joining and documenting peaceful anti-regime demonstrations. He was released in June 2013 and he headed straight for Lebanon where he — like over a million other Syrians — believed he could be safe.

«It started well. I had never had the chance to experience Beirut even though it's just a short drive from Damascus. I had heard a lot about it, that it was colorful, that there is freedom, art, music and good food», Ghannam said in our new home in Paris, as he puffed at a Syrian-made shisha that he bought days before leaving Beirut.

He had a job with the New York Times, his best friends moved to Beirut from Damascus, and together they explored one of the world's best party scenes. It didn't take them long to adapt to their new home; there were few cultural barriers and the city that had for decades welcomed wave upon wave of political exiles had this time become a hub for Syrian activists, artists, musicians and journalists.

«We lived great times. I met amazing people who changed me and helped me become the person I am now», he said. «I thought that I would spend a maximum of three years in Lebanon, and that the regime would fall. I believed I would go back to Syria sooner rather than later».

- 'Caterpillar to butterfly' -

But Syria took another path, and Lebanon obliged. And just over a year after he arrived, Ghannam was ordered to leave. He wasn't the only one to experience a short-term love affair with Beirut.

It also happened to my friend Mohammad Nour al-Akraa, an activist-turned-reporter from Homs.

He was only 21 when he, like thousands of his friends and neighbors, fled the Baba Amr district as it fell back into regime hands in early 2012.

Akraa arrived in Lebanon in shock, but happy. He had visited the country once before — in 2008. Speaking by phone from his new home in Berlin, he said he had tasted freedom for the first time then.

«I remember the feeling, it was like the air didn't fit in my

lungs», he said.

In Beirut, he too became a journalist for an international publication. He made friends with people from all over the world. He grew from a shy little boy into a young, confident man about town. Or as he put it, much more beautifully: «In Syria I was a caterpillar. In Beirut I became a butterfly». It took around three years, and a lot of twists and turns, for the Lebanese government to start making it very hard for Syrian refugees to stay. By then, it was official: Lebanon was home to world's highest refugee population per capita.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees lived in abject misery, with barely any aid trickling down to their makeshift camps dotted across the country. Children worked in potato farms for \$7 a day, and left without an education. People lived in flimsy tents and withstood snowy weather in the winter and drought in the summer.

But alongside the tragedy also came a flow of young people to Beirut, with a flood of creative energy and willingness to help. In the Lebanese capital meanwhile they partied, met people from all over the world, and discussed openly — perhaps for the first time — religion and atheism, sectarianism and politics.

Syrian musicians played with Lebanese artists, giving rise to an explosion of creativity that had us all dancing together one weekend after the next.

Couples fell in love and some tied the knot at wedding parties where guests chanted songs and revolutionary slogans that had last been heard in Aleppo or Homs. Others broke up as the pressures of exile became all too much to bear.

In the heat of summer 2014, I started hearing from more and more people that they had no choice but to leave.

Ghannam and Akraa, their backs against the wall, were among them.

«I tried to get a residence and work permit from the authorities, but they refused», Ghannam said, adding that as a Palestinian he was told by Lebanese authorities that he was not allowed to work as a journalist in the country.

As the influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon swelled, the Lebanese government tightened restrictions, making it increasingly hard for people to obtain permission to work legally. «I felt my life was over», he said, explaining that other host countries such as Turkey, Egypt or Jordan would also refuse him entry for the same reason, the fact that he was of Palestinian background.

- From dream to nightmare -

Akraa too tried hard to renew his residence permit, to no avail. «Many people won't understand this when they hear me, but truthfully it was harder for me to leave Beirut than Homs», he said.

And in the months that preceded their departure, the two lived fearful of any man in uniform. They were wary not just of detention, but also forcible return.

Their dream had become a nightmare that was infused with feelings of rejection and claustrophobia, arguably worsened by the emotional wounds they carried from the events they witnessed and suffered in Syria.

The hardship would last until their visas — their tickets to the future — came through.

It was March 1, 2015 — a date I'll never forget — when Ghannam and I took the plane to Paris together. For me this new adventure with the love of my life felt like an incredible gift from Beirut, the city I love and hate so deeply, and which my parents had grown up in and left during its own civil war.

A few months later, Akraa went to Germany. We stay in touch. He says it's too early to speak of feelings of exile. He has been reunited with other Syrian friends who also reached Germany, and he laughs as he says that «the shisha in Berlin is cheaper than in Beirut».

Fast forward to late summer 2015, the peak of the migrant crisis. Every day, thousands of people were reaching Greece and Italy's shores in unseaworthy boats. Most of them were Syrian, followed by Iraqis, Afghans and nationals of other countries mired in insecurity and poverty.

AFP sent me on two missions I won't ever forget. First I spent two weeks on the Greek island of Kos and then I travelled up the so-called Balkan migrant route, in the trail of an Iraqi couple and their three-month-old baby Adam as they made their way up to Western Europe.

Many of the people I met during those missions had similar stories to Ghannam and Akraa — though they had had the good fortune of travelling to Europe by plane.

Many of the refugees had suffered and witnessed horrific violence and persecution, not just in Syria but also in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Syrians among them had fled all sides of the war: rebels, jihadists, government troops, Kurdish forces. War is insane, my mother taught me. Her words rang truer than ever as I saw whole families sleep on the beach front in flimsy tents, waiting for permission to keep going. In Europe, many people have welcomed the migrants, instinctively understanding that if they risked their lives and overran border after border to get here, they must have had good reason to flee. But many others have turned the cold shoulder, putting to the test the soul of the continent. Despite the monumental difficulties of adapting — again — to a new country, Ghannam and Akraa remain hopeful. They both have good jobs, and they're making admirable progress with the language.

As for me, I am very happy in my new life with my future husband in Paris, but I do often think of Beirut. Lucky for me, I can visit whenever I want. Many Syrians who loved the city deeply aren't allowed in any more.

«We lost Beirut», says Akraa, bittersweet nostalgia making his voice crack.

«Beirut lost us», Ghannam says, defiant.

* AFP Lebanese correspondent residing in Paris

Darwish and El-Rass Sign Ard el-Samak

Revisiting language, identity and borders

Nayla Rached*

On the Internet and in every nook and cranny in Beirut, anger, rebellion and the need for a comeback break out in cries of slam, rap, music and collaboration between Lebanese and Syrian artists. Darwish's album, Ard el-Samak, produced by El-Rass, is a perfect example of it all.

Hani al-Sawah, aka Darwish, a native of Homs, moved in 2012 to Beirut; the Lebanese capital that he had initially visited in 2011 to participate in a multi collective album, Khatttalet, that brought together rappers from the Arab world. It was then that he weaved meetings, collaborations and friendships that, once he settled in Lebanon, allowed him to live, survive and have a roof to sleep under, at least for the first period, before he got used to Beirut.

Getting used to Beirut, however, did not happen overnight. He did not see one single upside to the city; he found it to be as detrimental as «a Gulf city within Bilad al-Sham,» with its life requirements and its economic system that take it in that direction. But in reality, «the people here resemble us, they do not resemble the people of the Gulf. This is less so in Beirut, but the more you go towards the south or the north, the more the similarities». These are similarities that were felt right from the first meeting with Mazen el-Sayed, alias El-Rass, from Tripoli; complicity in identity, culture, traditions, life, concerns and Sufism in its broadest sense. This complicity, human, professional and private at the same time, and based on improvisation and reflection, is at once evoked by the two of them; their words, collected separately, do not cease to spontaneously overlap on so many subjects, issues and concerns, through a synergy of thoughts and goals.

Towards a different kind of unity

From questions of identity, borders, redefining the geographical spaces, similarities across these borders, religion, secularism, equilibrium in the heart of the feature represented by the city of Beirut, «an island of possibilities within an explosive environment», the artistic responsibility, the failure of an era that



has proved its powerlessness to the need for a comeback in the Arab world inevitably linked to the language... the discussion with Darwish and El-Rass constantly dovetails their socio-political and artistic commitment.

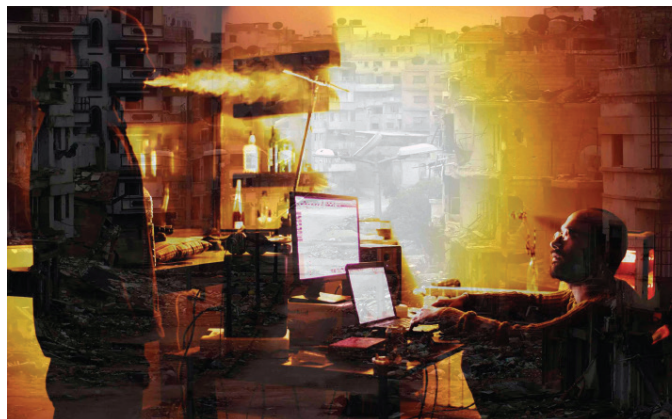
The Ard el-Samak (Land of Fish) album reflects, through its title, on this being exiled from its environment; that fish that reminds us of our so-short-memory that does nothing but repeat the same mistakes without even being aware of it.

Even if Darwish presents the album more like a collection, a booklet containing ideas written in the form of texts and complemented by the music of El-Rass, even hesitating over the use of the word rap, given all the stereotypes hovering around it, he stresses on the specificity of this «Arabic rap», which is in the process of shaping its personality for the last 5 to 6 years and which is a logical and normal development of the language; this Arabic language that is one of the key conveyors

of identity, as El-Rass puts it.

The ideas do not stop intersecting, beyond people's expectations or aspiration of this collaboration. Hence, Darwish at once confirms his astonishment every time he's asked whether this collaboration is helping to evolve the Lebanese-Syrian relations. «But what relations are we talking about in the first place?», he blurts, those of «the Syrian mandate, the Syrian regime and its Lebanese allies?». Claiming to be of those who believe that setting borders between one country and another, over a period of 60 years, does not create two separate civil societies, he thinks that «we are currently in the very act of creating a new concept of what unity is, of being on the same front, of having a common enemy...I regard this as a geographic expansion of a new generation across the Arab world. There's a community that is being built on a concept of unity, but one that is modern, new, resembles us and resembles what we want». That same askew smile takes hold of El-Rass' features, who points out that «this joint work is not based on a precise definition of the identity. The question of being Lebanese or Syrian is an open-ended question, it is a «blank page» that is at once a starting point and a field for work, and on which are written the ideas that are being exchanged in words and in music; maybe then we might feel, one day, that these ideas serve to build an approach to an identity that actually «suits us, because what's currently «on the market» is just not for us».

* Lebanese journalist



Artists from Damascus Find Refuge and a Platform in Beirut... and Their Works Reflect The War

Syrian brushes hold sway in Lebanon!

Rita El Hage*

With millions of Syrians leaving their homes to escape the war that has been ravaging their country for nearly five years and flee in all directions carrying their belongings and the pains of displacement and homelessness, Syrian artists have grabbed their paintings and drawing kits and settled here and there around the world. But they have found in Lebanon, which geographically and culturally is close to them, a safe haven and an ideal platform to showcase their works.

The war having dealt a heavy blow to all Syrians, including artists, Beirut's dynamic art scene has given Syrian artists more weight and provided them with an opportunity to access vaster spaces outside the borders of their own war-torn country.

Indeed Lebanon has witnessed an energetic Syrian plastic arts movement since the onset of unrest in Syria in 2011 as a result of artists fleeing Aleppo and Damascus to Beirut and the absence of an art movement in Syria. Some spaces in Beirut and two Syrian spaces active therein have embraced the activities of Syrian artists in the Lebanese capital.

Lebanese interest in Syrian artists

In fact, Beirut has always been an important stop for Syrian artists, but this interest has grown since the onset of unrest. While Ayyam Gallery, whose activities are currently limited to its branches in Beirut and Dubai after closing down its space in the «Umayyad capital,» is the center of attraction for many Syrian artists, its director in Beirut Rania Mounzer notes, «Lebanese spaces raced to attract Syrian artists at the beginning of the crisis whereas now interest has relatively waned.»

The Iraqi artist Leila Kubba who settled in Lebanon in 2006 and owns the Art Space Gallery in Beirut says that there is much focus in the Lebanese capital today

on Syrian artists. «Daily I get visits at the gallery from Syrian artists fleeing Syria to Lebanon and the same thing can be said of Iraqi artists who are searching for a platform to show their work,» says Kubba. Mark Hachem of Mark Hachem Gallery that started to show interest in Syrian artists in 2004, notes that works by Syrian artists «are attracting the interest of big art collectors.»

The 32-year-old artist Shadi Abosada brought along a collection of his paintings from As-Suwayda and landed in Beirut in 2011. While in Lebanon, this Department of Painting and Drawing graduate (University of Damascus) has taken part in group exhibitions and two solo exhibitions in the Lebanese capital. «Lebanon is the closest to the Syrian atmosphere linguistically and geographically, with its nature, mountains, valleys. This atmosphere suits me more than any other,» he said.

The 33-year-old artist Tarek Butayhi moved to Beirut in 2012 «because of the situation.» Butayhi was exhibited in several group exhibitions and two solo exhibitions in the Lebanese capital.

A platform for beginnings

Butayhi notes, «War is a catalyst for talent. Some artists were unknown in Syria and have launched their work outside the country.»

Mounzer points out that among the artists who had moved to Beirut, some have since traveled to Dubai, Germany or the Netherlands. Some Syrian artists represented by Ayyam Gallery who had come to Lebanon have left, such as Nihad Al Turk, who left to London with the support of the United Nations, and Oussama Diab, who settled in the Netherlands a few months ago. Others have left to the Gulf countries and Europe while a number of artists, such as Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik and Kais Salman, have remained in Beirut.

Syrian artists find a space for expression and a platform to launch their work in the Lebanese capital that is seething culturally and artistically and swarming with galleries and artistic and cultural activities. «Here galleries are more interested in artists,» says Abosada, «In Syria, the number of spaces is very limited and they only show

certain people. There is more interest here.»

Butayhi confirms saying, «There are very few galleries in Syria and the artist faces difficulties to show his work. Getting your name out takes more time than it does in Beirut. Personally I receive encouragement from gallery administrations here, in Kuwait and in Dubai.»

War in paintings

The political situation in Syria, the state of social displacement and the psychological frustration caused by the crisis is reflected in the works of young and veteran artists. Currently the Syrian plastic arts movement is seeing maturity and a versatility of schools, techniques and media, a fact that has helped it consolidate its singular character according to experts.

Mark Hachem considers that the war in Syria «highlighted its artists power of expression in a simple way and a beautiful language» and he remarks that their paintings depict «suffering, frustration and sorrow.» Hachem views this as «an Arab artistic rebirth to which Syrian artists are making a significant contribution.» There are minute differences that can be observed in the works of one artist before and during the Syrian crisis.

Abosada says, «The artist cannot lie. He has to be honest in his paintings.» He adds, «Since my graduation in 2008, I have been working on shadows. When I started the shadows were gray and now they are white and the people are black.» He describes his paintings by saying, «They show joy and sorrow and depict the daily scenes we see on the street.»

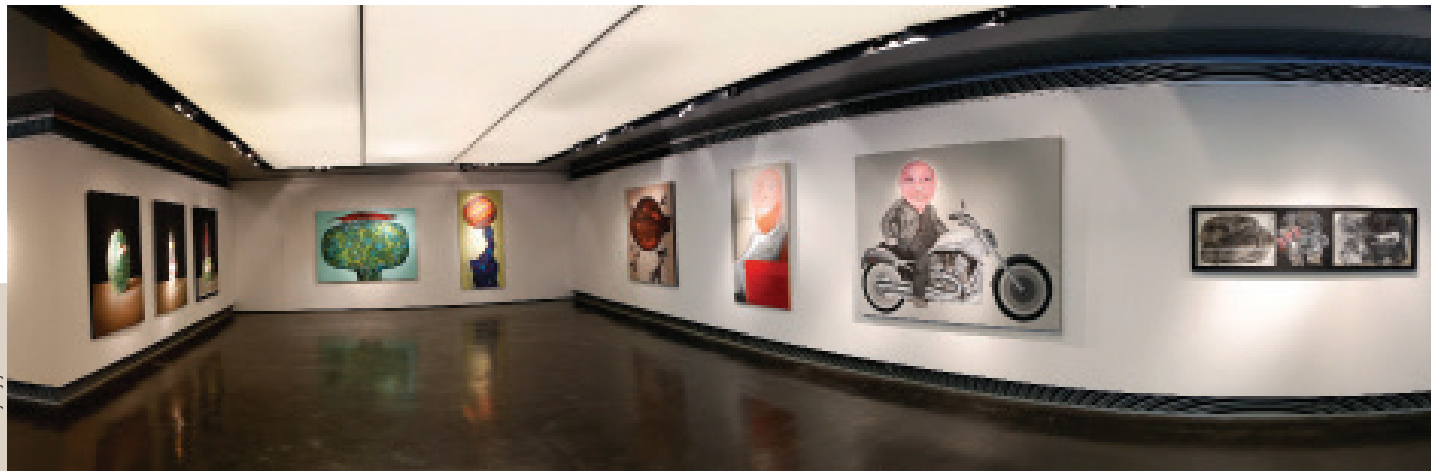
Since his graduation in 2005, Tarek Butayhi has been working on the theme of women, but most of what he paints now revolves around the war. He considers Beirut to be a fertile ground for his work as it has «a great deal of movement and openness.»

The book titled «Syria's Apex Generation» published by the Ayyam Gallery and written by the gallery's artistic director Maymanah Farhat includes a comparative account of the work of five Syrian artists before and during the war. These artists are Nihad Al Turk, Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik, Othman Moussa, Mohannad





© From the page of the Syrian painter Tarek Boutayhi



© Gallery Ayyam - Beirut

Orabi and Kais Salman. In addition, Farhat discusses the history of plastic arts in Syria starting from the Ottoman era and all the way to the French mandate, the founding of the Department of Painting and Drawing at the University of Damascus in the 1960s and the present day.

In this regard, Mounzer says, «For instance, Nihad Al Turk used dark colors in the past during his stay in Syria and the feeling in his paintings has now become more

colorful since he moved to Beirut.» She adds, «The first year was tough for Syrian artists, so it influenced their work. Some excelled while others felt lost and found themselves in a dead end and could not take one step further, requiring more time to adapt and come up with a new idea or a new exhibition. Each artist has his own way of dealing with the situation.»

According to Mounzer, each painter has his own story and experience. The young

artist Abdul Karim Majdal Al-Beik created a large painting titled «Syria in Fires» with symbols are knives; in creating it he used five meter wide soldier tents.

Abosada believes that Syrians and Lebanese share certain things, and says, «We practically live in the same atmosphere, but the Lebanese are more open to the West whereas we are perhaps more inclined to our Eastern culture.» Nevertheless, despite the importance of

the experience they are going through today, Syrian artists are eager to return to their homeland once it regains its stability. «Syria is my country and I can't give up on it,» says Abosada, while Butayhi says, «I will definitely go back to my country and Beirut would be my second place of residence; it is my second Damascus. We will leave Beirut but we will miss it.»

** AFP Lebanese correspondent in Beirut*

My experience in Lebanon as a Syrian artist And how the Lebanese society is influenced by my artwork

Eman Nawaya*

I arrived in Lebanon over two years ago, but until today, my art is still thirsty for the spirit of this country, my artistic life nothing short of a love story.

I am a Syrian visual artist. I graduated in 2012, full of enthusiasm to own a small atelier in the Old City of Damascus. I did not have the chance to realize that, in one way or another, so the only other option lying before me was Beirut. The Beirut of Jubran and Darwich and Akl. So I arrived here, ready to welcome myself in it. Beirut did not disappoint me, it leniently welcomed me along with my feminism for art; my studies of the female and her elements, her relationship with the partner and the relation between the two sexes for four years have not quenched my obsession yet.

Inarguably, this society's blend and relations more than inspire me, and they add to the subject of my artwork. The weather of this city has also been a catalyst for developing my artist tactics; my colors are enamored with the sea, and forms captivated by the Beirut sky. It was not hard for my artwork to be presented in this city, nor for it to be accepted and surrounded as a project that is both impressive and influenced by its society; the Lebanese girl had a share of my lines and formations. This has all met up and shaped my solo exhibition that not only was deservedly inspired by this place's tone, but also echoed it and the relationship of its members with it.

Some might think that I am one of the many artists who have occupied themselves with the subject of war and destruction that have exhausted my homeland. In fact, however, I am still working on the subject of relationships and their contents as I believe that bringing them to life and placing them under the spotlight, either to venerate them or to criticize their compatibility with the place and the existence, might help us avoid many of the wars and conflicts and escape the destruction to build and bring to life a genuine coherent product originating in partnership and existence without any conflicts or rivalry. Add to that, I preferred leaving the subject of war to my fellow artists who would highlight it their own way, without emulating them. This is also out of fear of depreciating it; neither my country nor its people and their sufferings are a subject of consumption or profiteering.

...Beirut today is my fountain and that of most of whom have preceded me to it.

** Syrian visual artist*



© Painting by painter Eman Nawaya from her collection «Female Flashes», Beirut 2016

