

# The Peace Building In Lebanon

Joint news supplement

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## Special Edition

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© Alia Haju Syrian female farmers arranging tomatoes after harvesting them in the Bekaa Valley



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Towards a Disciplinary  
Approach to History  
Education



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## Combating Hate Speech

Today's digital era allows people from all over the world to connect and communicate easily, providing the potential to facilitate social cohesion and build cross-cultural understanding. Unfortunately, the increasingly globalized nature of communication technology has also been subject to abuse as hate speech has become more prevalent. Much of it can be found on online social media and can develop into discriminatory actions and violence. The ability to remain anonymous online or the feeling of safety behind a screen makes it easier to express hateful opinions. Media can also be a perpetrator, fomenting divisions among people through misconceptions and the demonization of the «Other».

The danger of hate speech was especially evident after the recent suicide attacks in Al Qaa. These despicable acts against innocent Lebanese were followed, in some parts of the country, by verbal and physical aggressions against innocent Syrian

refugees, perpetrated by people legitimately outraged by the Al Qaa attacks, but who wrongly associate the occurrence of terrorist acts with the presence of the refugees. The Lebanese authorities were prompt in condemning and stopping these actions. Media, too, can play a key role in countering misperceptions and encourage a more understanding, tolerant attitude.

Back in 2013, the UNDP-sponsored «Journalists' Pact for Strengthening Civil Peace in Lebanon», stated (art. 3): «Journalists shall commit to strengthening national unity and coexistence, respect religions, refrain from instigating sectarian or confessional strife, and reject violent disobedience movements, crime, and abasement»; and again in art. 1: «Journalists shall refrain from spreading a spirit of violence and strife». Since then, UNDP has continued to work with media editors and journalists to monitor the implementation of the Pact through periodical analysis of the contents

of news and editorials, in partnership with the Maharat Foundation.

Social media can also be powerful instruments of positive messages. After the Al Qaa attacks, for example, Lebanese Twitter users have united against racism towards Syrians through the trending hashtag #RefugeesAreNotTerrorists, hoping to counter xenophobia and distill misperceptions about refugees.

This supplement you are about to read aims to be a space free of hatred and misconceptions. You'll find a variety of different perspectives shedding light on critical and sometimes controversial topics. We hope that this will inspire positive action and contribute to establishing a more open and peaceful dialogue on issues that are of a concern today.

**Luca Renda**

UNDP Country Director

## «We can do this», together

A year has passed since German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared her famous catchphrase «Wir schaffen das!» (We can do this) opening Germany's door to hundreds of thousands of refugees. Few months later, a new integration law has been agreed upon to better integrate refugees into German society, helping them to find work or training. In return to the aid offered by the state, refugees were expected to show readiness and eagerness to become a part of Germany.

Not just like Germany, even more so Lebanon has played an important role in hosting Syrian refugees.

The small country with enough problems of its own didn't choose this situation. However, it is working on the best ways to challenge it on all levels.

One of these challenges resides in realizing the socio-economic benefits that result from this temporary migration to Lebanon. Not to put aside most inconveniences of this migration, but if refugees were openly considered an opportunity to be welcomed rather than a burden to be shared, so many more substantial economic dividends could be yield and new ideas and technologies could spark.

The role of media in shedding light on this issue is crucial. In this supplement you have in hands, several topics ranging from economic, social, and cultural aspects of the repercussions of the Syrian crisis are highlighted. I invite you to enjoy reading the content of this supplement, which is also focusing on several peace building and national concerns.

**Mister Carsten Meyer-Wiefhausen**  
Chargé d'Affaires of the German  
Embassy in Beirut

## The Wrong Target

The Syrian refugees arriving in successive waves into Europe have experienced all the pangs of anxiety, often coming close to death from the hazardous crossing of their own country to their perilous journey at sea. And among those arriving at their destination, very few have been able to integrate smoothly by quickly finding a job and accommodation. Of course, there are functional hosting facilities on the old continent, ready to offer help within their means. But the compassion that the first refugees arriving in Europe sparked eventually turned into rejection among local populations. The same applies for the US where some 10,000 Syrian refugees were offered asylum. No committee or media outlet to welcome them, and although some communities showed them support, they have also been subject to a wave of opposition, including 31 governors who have demanded that refugees be banned from entering the US territory in the wake of attacks in Europe. In the heat of the election campaign for the US presidency, the issue of hosting Syrian refugees on American soil has taken a particularly emotional turn.

Yet it happens to be that the Europeans and Americans have the wrong target in their crosshairs by making the displaced responsible for terrorism. To date, no jihadist who had committed attacks in Europe or the United States came from the refugee communities. On the contrary, many of these terrorists were already residents or even Western citizens, and we won't be able to block their paths with xenophobic attitudes and tougher immigration laws.

Which is quite logical: it is not a refugee who flees war and violence to escape death, who fights tooth and nail to get a residence permit, who struggles to find a job... It is not this man who plots suicide operations. It's a matter of logical coherence.

**Gaby Nasr**

Managing Editor - L'Orient-Le Jour supplements

## Feels Like Yesterday

Although it must have been over a year ago, in fact before the onset of last winter, that we appealed to the international community to make more meaningful efforts to help ease the plight of the millions of Syrian refugees displaced by the brutal war ravaging their country, it feels like it was only yesterday.

That's not surprising, considering that since that time very little has changed for the better on the ground. If anything, as winter comes around once more, and it is expected to be far more severe than in recent years, the flight of refugees from Syria continues at the same pace as before, if not more, with the bulk of those displaced internally or stranded on foreign soil surviving in abject poverty.

Migrants continue to risk life and limb in dangerous waters simply to reach safer shores where their lives might not be extinguished at any moment by airstrikes or barrel bombs. And sadly those who survive the perilous journey face the same brutality and indifference that they had hoped to leave behind. Moreover, the lion's share of pledges made by numerous countries to help refugees has yet to materialize, while the overburdened countries hosting them such as Turkey, Jordan and tiny Lebanon, which bears the world's greatest proportion compared to its own population, are simply trying to keep their heads above water.

Meanwhile, developed countries that are spearheading the calls to assist refugees are themselves shirking from the responsibility of taking in these displaced families, women, children and elderly, with most of them considering the arrival of a mere few thousand as far more than their countries can handle.

It is truly shameful that today, more than five years after the start of the Syrian conflict, the world still finds it beyond its ability to come to the rescue of desperate people with no one else to turn to.

**Nadim Ladki**

Editor in Chief - The Daily Star

## Asylum is an opportunity to strengthen relations between two peoples

One people in two countries is wrong. Two peoples in one country is also wrong. Two peoples in two countries is the truth that some have denied and other still deny for political rather than realistic reasons; because the concept of geography, and some shared history, does not apply to the Lebanese and Syrian peoples only, but also to most of the countries and peoples of the Levant before the establishment of the current states.

Thus, correcting concepts and expressions becomes the entryway to clarifying the course of the relationship and determining the duties and rights. The Syrian presence in Lebanon becomes asylum and not displacement from one region to another within the same homeland. Accordingly, the nature of rights takes on a different character and the right of return becomes logical, even if it would take a long time to accomplish, just as is the case with the Palestinian refugees.

But the reality is that the Syrian people and we are in the same adversity. The damned war brings us together. Civil war or the war of others on our lands, the one that we went through for 15 years and still are not done with. We are still experiencing its effects to this day because we did not purge our memory and did not reconcile with the true sense of the word reconciliation. We turned the page on the dross. So, the specter of war still lurks around the corner and rears its head at every turn.

The Syrians today are not better off. Trying, along with a part of the international community, to find a settlement, which will probably be political and not military. Each party of them wants to have the last word. You realize that they are not drawing lessons from the experience of the country nearest to them. Lebanon, which ended 15 years of war, without anyone having the last word, and has not been able to build a real peace to this day. Syrian citizens, in Syria or Lebanon, have to fully realize that their fate is one: if their homeland is lost, they will be lost, and if they wrong their hosts in Lebanon, they will only attract enmity and make their stay hell instead of it being genuine hospitality and an opportunity to strengthen brotherly relations between the two peoples.

**Ghassan Hajjar**

Editor in Chief - An-Nahar newspaper

## Displaced People are not Mere Figures

It is quite a disgrace when Man becomes just another figure, viewed through the prism of mathematics and statistics. His personality is stripped, his values absented and he is transformed into a burden in a demographic equation or a total in need of a solution.

The Syrians in Lebanon are transforming into figures. The goal is to inspire fear in the Lebanese of «the invasion of the displaced persons».

It is even more of a disgrace when tragedy is abstracted in a quantity. Each person has his own story and his own cause. Generalizations are deliberate stamping out of detail. While the tragedy of the displaced lies in the details of their suffering, and their suffering is clutter. Resurrection is still far on the horizon. It is outrageous that the displaced people have become a political problem, as is the case in Europe that closed its doors to them. They are a humanitarian cause that needs to be tackled from the perspective of human brotherhood. The displaced person has enough dealing with the hardships of asylum; to alleviate his suffering is a moral duty. Mankind has not yet lived up to the unity of «human brotherhood».

Lebanon suffers from its problems that preceded the Syrian displacement. To make the displaced persons bear the responsibility for these problems or compounding them is qualified deceit; evasion of truth. The world could still awaken from its slumber one day and proclaim a law on «the rights of the displaced people», so long as wars will not be stopping, conflicts are on the rise, and displacement is as a result of this violence.

Peace is still out of reach. The protection of the displaced persons and those fleeing wars is a project worth striving for. Addressing wars by putting an end to them and addressing displacement with «temporary peace» in outspread diaspora... Perhaps something of this nature may well still happen. The war is still in its early stages.

**Nasri Sayegh**

Deputy Editor in Chief  
As-Safir newspaper

# Identity or Identities?

Mona Fayad\*

**The current era is characterized by a prevalence of wars and conflicts, in addition to political, social and cultural problems. Crimes of murder and extermination in the name of religious, ethnic and national identities are resulting in demographic shifts effected through naturalization or «transfer», or through the clearing land of its owners, the fact which has made the concept of «identity» more widely used than any previous era.**

## Personal Identity

Identity refers to the individuality of a person, to his characteristics. It includes concepts of self-awareness and self-representation, in addition to everything which is constant and unique in a person. My identity is what makes me different from any other human being since it is the product of a mental construction, a conscious process at times and unconscious at others, linked to a person's past and experiences.

## Social Identity

The concept of social identity constitutes a dynamic component, which in turn includes within it the individual identity component. Social Identity is the individual's «awareness» of belonging to a historical group, providing him with a functional framework to satisfy his need for psychological security, and a referential frame for creating a value and cultural system that organizes his perception, interaction, and evaluation of the world. This is undertaken in the pursuit of achieving common and collective goals, without conflicting with his own personal identity. In this sense, social identity is the product of common experiences and a common lifestyle shared by the members of that historical group. But in addition to sharing common glories of the past and a common will in the present, there is also the accomplishment of great work together and the desire for coexistence.

## Identity, Sectarianism, and Violence

### The Psychology of Wounded Identity

We hear a lot about Lebanese, Syrian and Iraqi peoples, and the dominance of sectarian identity over national identity. So how accurate are these statements?

The violent political conflict erupted in Iraq after its occupation along sectarian and ethnical lines. While in Syria, after the revolution, the conflict erupted between the ruling regime and the power of the Alawite minority and opposition groups and predominantly Sunni groups; the fact which made the conflict transform into a conflict based on sectarian and ethnic identities. Millions were displaced and entire social groups marginalized and placed in a «state of exception», so that they now feel threatened together on a sectarian basis.

Since the 2006 war, Lebanon has been subject to a vertical split that has taken a sharp doctrinal turn as one of the aspects of the acute regional conflict and the involvement of essential Lebanese components in the Syrian war.

In such situations, the person's attention is focused and his existence centered on the targeted component. In an identities conflict, we often recognize ourselves to belong to the group most vulnerable to attack, and we identify with this belonging fully, whether we publicly adopt it or conceal it. The sought belonging, whether color, religion, language, class or sect, as in our case, overwhelms our whole identity. And those who partake in it feel solidarity. So they gather, mobilize and cheer one another on, attacking those who are confronting them. The reaffirmation of identity becomes an act of courage and liberation.

Needless to say that what determines the individual's belonging to a particular group is essentially his desire to resemble them and gain their love and approval. As a result, we observe his subjection to the influence of those close to him, i.e. his group, family and religious group who seek to own him. But he is also influenced, though negatively, by those confronting him because they seek to eliminate him.

As a consequence, identity wounds are created because the others make him feel different and that his difference is a stigma and isolation, thus amplifying his staunch adherence to his identity group.

The resulting wounds are what determine at each stage of the cycle of life the position of individuals regarding their belonging and they also determine the hierarchy of this belonging.

Strangely this approach does not accord any importance to the fact that this exclusive belonging is in itself variable and multifaceted. Belonging is to a nation, but in the eyes of some, it

is to a religion, nationality or language. This means that the idea of belonging itself is relative. And where the threat is posed to the native language or ethnic group, they do not hesitate to enter into a fierce confrontation with the members of the same religion, as is the case between the Muslim Turks and Kurds or between the Arabs themselves in the renewed Sunni-Shiite conflict. Often our declared identity is the negative image of our opponent's identity.

## The Threatened Lebanese Identity!

Recently, many indications point to the fact that the majority of the Lebanese hold firmly unto their Lebanese identity more than ever before; manifested in their demands for a State, attachment to the flag and the symbol of the cedar<sup>(1)</sup> on it, and celebration of the Lebanese army, which means a demand to limit the defense of the homeland to the state and its army.

Shibley Telhami<sup>(2)</sup> has conducted a survey in several stages and it was revealed in it that the percentage of those who consider themselves to be Lebanese first and foremost rose after 2011. He concluded that this was natural as threatened identity becomes the most important and powerful. Arguably, Lebanon which is threatened in its very presence makes the Lebanese people's attachment stauncher than ever.

In general, we can talk of several features that reflect the presence of a Lebanese identity or spirit as represented in a particular personality type, which appears in art in general and in folklore, political heritage, cuisine, mood, dialects and the predilection for freedom and openness... And the same applies to the Syrian identity with a different content. In a way, it can be agreed that there is a Lebanese social and national identity, and other Syrian, Iraqi, Palestinian and Egyptian social and national identities...

Yet, the question on everyone's mind comes up: What is the future of these identities in light of the manifestations of division, intolerance and civil strife that we are witnessing presently?

What should be noted in this respect is that political events are characterized by their speed and constant change, whereas the psychology of human beings is profound and slow and, therefore, does not change along with instantaneous political changes and shifts.

In addition, the social identity of the individual does not always coincide with the identity of the political framework of the geographical spot in which he lives. For example, the dispersal of Arabs across many countries with disparate political frameworks did not prevent the permanence of Arab belonging as an integral part of their identity, and being qualified as one of the aspects of social identity. Moreover, the dispersal of the Kurds in several neighboring national regions and countries, each with its own different political or national system, did not get in the way of their firm attachment to their historical Kurdish identity. The same process has characterized Palestinians in the occupying state of Israeli so they became even more attached to their Palestinian identity.

The common psychological system is formed over a long period of time and does not undergo fundamental changes before a long time has passed. In other words, the political event, due to its speed, may impose certain historical conditions on the external behavior of a group, without it necessarily being able to create changes similar to the logic of those conditions in the internal psychological system of that group. For the political event moves and positions itself in time much faster than the psychological impact it leaves on the individual and the group in spite of the dialectical link between the two. This explains why many peoples are able to retain their national and cultural identity over long years of occupation and the rule of invading colonial armies; although we cannot deny the occurrence of fragmentation here and there that could become a

(1) Some used to consider it a «cauliflower», in the sense of spurning their belonging to the Lebanese State, most of those took part in the uprising of March 14 in defense of Lebanon's sovereignty and independence and raised the Lebanese flag as a symbol representing them.

(2) Telhami, Shibley: *The World Through Arab Eyes: Arab Public Opinion and the Reshaping of the Middle East*, Publisher: Basic Books, 2013.

threat to identity if it continues for a long time.

The capitalization on sectarian passions intended to inflame them at the expense of a fragmented uniting national identity only points to the unfortunate deterioration of the mental health of the society, especially among the elites and influential leaders in the development of their social personality.

But it is likely that this group that finds itself in crisis would come out of its situation when the surrounding conditions change, as already happened with the German people and their Nazi experience. In addition, individual traits cannot dominate, whatever their type, in light of the accelerating globalization which makes the world a connected and linked global village.

## On Syrian Asylum and Racism

Since mid-2013, there has been a surge of heavy Syrian displacement to Lebanon to the backdrop of Lebanon's serious economic and social crisis as a result of internal problems in addition to the conflict in Syria, including a reduction in the proceeds from trade, tourism and investment, and an increase in public expenditure, while public services fail to meet the growing demand.

Five years following the start of the open conflict in Syria, Lebanon finds itself in a «catastrophic situation»: it is the country with the highest number of refugees in the world<sup>(3)</sup>, in terms of the proportion of the number of refugees to the local population, as well as in terms of the density of the refugees in proportion to the area of this small land. And attention should be paid to the threatened societal balance whose effects are beginning to be felt increasingly in the increase in the rate of violence and crime and their kind to previously unknown levels (major increase in murders of women, cutting up bodies, and unidentified victims...). In light of all this, we periodically witness a media frenzy at each security attack occurring in Lebanon, and quickly the enmity of some against them rears its head, the racism syndrome emerges and the finger of blame is pointed at the Syrian refugees. A wave of incitement against Syrian refugees is sweeping over us, often coming from government officials in generalizations of sorts of hatred, racism, and discrimination against refugees in bulk, which deepens and exacerbates problems instead of working on containing them.

It is worth noting here the social psychology law: highlighting only the negatives and promoting the idea that the Lebanese people is racist and rejects Syrian refugees is the best gift to fanatics and racists because it increases the cohesion of their position and strengthens their fanatical identity.

Infringement and abuse, which is observed in the most civilized societies and the examples are innumerable, must be exposed, but without paying lip service or exaggerating.

Fear of the other and exploitation of the weak are human traits and weaknesses and those who exploit the Syrians and Syrian children, women, and elders, are Syrians and Lebanese of various nationalities.

So, for the sake of the future of relations between the two peoples, it is more useful to focus on the positive aspects also and not only condemn and amplify the negative ones. A racist discourse and the cacophony it creates overshadows the positive treatment and the overall acceptance of Syrians present around us wherever we, in shops, cafes, restaurants, and supermarkets, as customers, workers and professionals, are treated normally. And this despite the risks of competition, increased unemployment and reduced quality of life for all involved.

\* Lebanese academic and writer

(3) The number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has been estimated at 2.5 million against 4.5 million Lebanese. The representative of Turkey has estimated the number of refugees to Turkey at 2.4 million, and here a comparison with the population of Turkey is due (a 2014 survey estimates the population of Turkey at 81.619 million), in Jordan 1.4 million Syrians (22% of the population). The figures were presented during the Konrad Adenauer conference at the Lebanese American University titled «The Syrian Refugee Crisis», Beirut, March 27, 2015.

# I Hate You : Peace Building in Lebanon

**Magda Abu-Fadil\***

« I Hate You. »

**A powerful statement and title of a 385-page study on hate speech and sectarianism in «Arab Spring» media. It is also a reflection of countless Arab world afflictions that was published in 2014 by the Amman-based Center for Defending Freedom of Journalists (CDFJ).**

«In the Arab Spring's crisis, it is hard to provide a stamp of innocence to exonerate Arab media from responsibility in the spread of hate speech, since most are co-conspirators in their practice, or in their silence,» wrote CDFJ Executive President Nidal Mansour in the book's foreword (page 9).

It plunges into case studies of hate speech in Jordan, as that is manifested against Syrian refugees, but it may as well have been addressing the issue in Lebanon, where a host of similarities exist.

Fast forward to 2016, with an increasingly hostile environment to Syrian refugees escaping a bloody and protracted conflict in their country to neighboring Lebanon.

Which has prompted organizations such as the Racism Observatory Campaign to document cases of human rights and other violations against Syrian refugees and displaced persons across the country. RAC's Facebook page is full of pictures, videos and posts on how Lebanese are reacting to the growing Syrian presence in Lebanon.

The justifications for the xenophobia are plentiful as Lebanon and its wobbly economy and infrastructure groan under the weight of some 1.5 million Syrians, depending on whose statistics one believes.

At issue are added pressure on water, electricity, food supplies and health care, to sewage and garbage disposal, competition for jobs, security concerns, and a rising crime rate, many Lebanese attribute to the bloated foreign presence.

Residents of various towns and villages have imposed night curfews on Syrian refugees to mitigate dangers posed by «marauding strangers.»

In some areas, locals have armed themselves following a spate of break-ins, thefts, assaults, rapes and murders. Another major concern is that the Syrians who tend to have a high birth rate, like Palestinian refugees before them, would make Lebanon their permanent home and become naturalized.

This would throw an already precarious demographic equation completely off-balance by turning Lebanon into a «depot for war refugees,» headlined Al Joumhouriya newspaper.

That prompted Maronite Patriarch Beshara El Rahi to call for the refugees' relocation to protected areas inside Syria until the war, well into its fifth year, ends. «There should be another measure for them to find safe zones in Syria,» The Daily Star quoted him as saying.

A blogpost by Stephanie Matar – no longer online – attributed hate speech in Lebanon to: culture (consumer products with racist names); social environment (inbred racism); legislation (racist and misogynist laws); external factors (a reflection of the region and neighboring countries); money (media's close ties to politics); and, social media (politicians and others take to different outlets to lambast media and each other).

Which begs the questions: What comes first, the chicken or the egg? Who provokes first, thereby triggering violent reactions? Why is there no rational discourse? Why is logic in such short supply?

It is not just the absence of credible and effective state institutions, such as a vacant presidency for over two years, a record-setting level of corruption across the board in state and private organizations, or endless reports of violence and armed assaults, but how children reflect their home environments and how they are raised on a steady diet of mayhem, as if it were normal and acceptable.

According to Lebanese University media professor Nassim El Khoury, provocation and sedition via the media, notably broadcast outlets, has turned them into platforms for insults, denigration, fear mongering and obfuscation of facts.

It's probably a holdover from Lebanon's 1975-90 Civil War as well as the collective amnesia and denial that grip many Lebanese who still refer to that conflict, euphemistically, as «the events» or «the incidents.» The fact that the country's academics seem unable, or unwilling, to agree on a credible schoolbook detailing Lebanon's contemporary, conflict-ridden history is a testament to their ineffectiveness and intellectual impotence.

Dr. Guita Hourani, Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center and Assistant Professor at Notre Dame University's Faculty of Law and Political Science, told me last year that Lebanese and foreign media coverage had contributed to the stereotyping of both refugees and host country Lebanon.

Her comments were part of a chapter I wrote on Lebanon in «Moving Stories: International Review of How Media Cover Migration» and in which I detail case studies of outrageous journalistic behavior.

So is there a light at the end of the tunnel?

Stephanie Matar's blogpost recommended the following:

- Updating invalid legislation, notably Lebanon's

Publications Law, so that social media define humanitarian standards.

- Spreading a culture of human rights to create awareness among citizens about their social media, and all forms of communications, rights.
- Understanding international legal humanitarian culture.
- (Lebanon's) national society must reconcile itself with itself.

Proponents of «constructive journalism,» meanwhile, recommend:

- A solution-oriented framing of the news.
- A productive perspective about the future, and about our ability to get there.
- Being critical, but never cynical.
- Putting new questions to power (government and officials), so-called victims and experts, inquiring about resources, collaborations and solutions on issues of high societal significance.
- Utilizing data to create infographics and other tangible visuals to explain the news, notably given people's short attention spans.
- Engaging and empowering the public and co-creating with them.

Journalists covering the refugee and migration story would do well to read «Guidelines for the application of the Rome Charter: A working tool for accurate media coverage on migration and asylum.»

An incredible irony is that Hanan Al Houroub - whose family name means wars in Arabic - a Palestinian mother and instructor from Al Bireh, became a symbol of forgiveness and won the «Best Teacher in the World» award in 2016 for her peaceful teaching methods against Israel's formidable occupation and war machine.

Saferworld, an organization dedicated to preventing violent conflict and building safer lives, launched a campaign to promote peace and coexistence in Yemen, another country plagued by strife.

Its initiative includes a video entitled «Let's coexist» and in August 2016 it announced it would pilot a remote learning peace-building course for activists in Yemen using the popular mobile phone app 'WhatsApp.'

It also published useful briefing papers entitled «The Syrian refugee crisis: Understanding and responding to tensions and conflicts in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey», the three countries with the largest number of Syrians fleeing the war.

A concerted effort to promote media and information literacy is a key component in the fight against extremism and ignorance. I have been advocating (and practicing it) for about two decades. There is no shortage of enterprising and innovative

ways to counter violence, hate speech, xenophobia, racism, and other tribulations afflicting Lebanon. People of good will are already hard at work to reverse, or slow down, these manifestations. But it's an uphill struggle that requires the media's

cooperation, positive engagement on all levels, and perseverance. The simplest solutions usually work best.

*\*Veteran journalist, blogger and director of Media Unlimited*

● Live



# Syrian Minorities in Lebanon: Between the Realities of Asylum and the Dreams of Immigration

Anas Weppi\*

In Bourj Hammoud, one of Beirut's major suburbs, George is walking home, impervious to the summer heat and carrying some personal and immigration dossier documents, his eyes beaming with a twinkle of hope.

George has come to Lebanon with his family fleeing the violence that has spread since 2013 across the Assyrian villages located on the banks of Khabur River in the Syrian Governorate of Al-Hasakah. George said that at the time, he was working in Iraq, but with the entry of the organization of the Islamic State (ISIS) into his village and the proliferation of kidnapping and destruction of Christian religious symbols and other acts of violence, he left with his wife and three daughters to the city of Hasakah for a while, before deciding to definitively get out of Syria and head to Lebanon in mid-2015.

He continued by saying that the main challenges he faces in Lebanon are financial hardships and providing a decent life for himself and his family, especially after they had lost everything they had in Syria and had to begin their new lives from scratch in a country dubbed expensive, as he put it.

Bourj Hammoud is considered one of the most mixed-population areas, where an Armenian majority lives side by side with

other denominations, in addition to large numbers of Syrians who arrived following the Syrian crisis in 2011. It is also home to a number of workers from Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt and Asian nationalities.

«The view of Syrian refugees is an all-encompassing view by the host community, and the Syrian is Syrian whatever his religion,» thus George described the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon with their various denominations and ethnicities. But at the same time, he spoke of some privileges and support that he received through associations and churches, in addition to obtaining a job as an English language teacher at a nearby school. This is what helps him get by while he waits for the day to come when he emigrates to Canada.

It is worth noting that the number of Assyrians who have arrived in Lebanon since the beginning of the Syrian crisis is 1,300 households, according to statements by the acting head of the Assyrian Church in Lebanon, Chorbishop Yatron Koliana, before many of them leave to Australia, Canada and Europe.

## The country of minorities receives even more minorities

The Syrians of Assyrian ethnicity were not alone in their plight of seeking asylum in the countries neighboring Syria and the world.

Tens of thousands of Kurds, Armenians, Syriac Christians and other diverse ethnic minorities were forced to flee the violence and the new realities imposed on their towns and villages.

Johnny Azara, a young Syrian Syriac Christian who fled to Lebanon in 2014, said: «The bomb attacks that took place near my house in the city of Al-Qamishli, the incident of my son being kidnapped for hours, and the fear and horror that we experienced, made us take the decision of fleeing to a safer place.»

Johnny lives with his wife and eight-year-old son in the Nabaa neighborhood part of the Municipality of Bourj Hammoud, which is a neighborhood with a mixed population that includes Lebanese of different denominations in addition to Syrian and Iraqi refugees, and a number of

African and Asian workers.

«There's not much work, rents are expensive, and there are a few problems here... I'm not at ease psychologically here, but we're getting by» with these words Johnny summed up his living conditions in Lebanon. Johnny did not receive any kind of support from civil society organizations or churches, and his requests for admitting his son to a free of charge school were unsuccessful, according to him.

He went on to say that some of the major difficulties that he was currently facing were not enjoying any legal residency documents, especially following the tough measures imposed by the Lebanese authorities on Syrians in 2015, which now require a Lebanese sponsor in addition to annual fees for renewal of the residency permit costing more than USD 200. This limits his mobility and puts him in danger of arrest and exploitation by employers in the event he does find a job.

Assyrians and Syriac refugees are concentrated in «the Assyrian neighborhood» in Sid El-Bauchrieh, Sabtieh, Ashrafieh and others.



### The Armenians of Syria and a new exodus

It can be said that the situation of refugees from Syrian religious and ethnic minorities are to a large extent similar to those of the other Syrian refugees.

However, some of the minorities present within the fabric of the Lebanese society are trying to support and assist their kin arriving from Syria through some NGOs and other civil society activities. In other cases, refugees are being embraced in host communities of common descent.

This applies to the Armenian refugees from Syria who were originally displaced to Syria from their lands by Ottoman authorities, roughly a hundred years ago, and are today experiencing a second exodus to Lebanon as a result of the conflict in Syria.

Tony, a young Armenian who came from Sulaymaniyah district in the city of Aleppo in 2013, said that the factor of common language and culture had made it easy for him to integrate and deal with his new environment in Bourj Hammoud. He added that his relatives had been met with the same good treatment in Anjar, a town with an Armenian majority in the Beqaa Governorate in Lebanon.

The number of Armenians who fled to Lebanon since the beginning of the Syrian crisis is estimated at 10,000 refugees, according to informed sources. About 40% of them have left to Europe, Canada and Australia, while others have preferred to return to their motherland Armenia. It is noteworthy that most of them came from the city of Aleppo in addition to groups that had arrived from Homs, Syrian coastal cities and villages on the Syrian-Turkish border. As for their locations in Lebanon, they

are distributed like other Syrian refugees in various Lebanese regions, while large numbers of them are concentrated in Bourj Hammoud district and towns of North Metn.

### Other Syrian components have passed by here or still remain

Before 2011, Syrian Kurds used to make up an important part of the Syrian labor in Lebanon, especially in the field of business and the liberal professions.

With the expansion of the Syrian crisis and the intensification of fighting in Kurdish areas between the Kurdish People's Protection Units and ISIS, many of them were forced to seek refuge in the Kurdish areas in Iraq. In addition, tens of thousands have crossed the border into Lebanon.

Sabah talked about her memories in the city of Aleppo with heartbreak: «We used to live in safety and planned for a beautiful future for our children, and suddenly everything was lost... May God curse the one behind this.»

Sabah had grown up in one of the Kurdish villages along the Turkish-Syrian border and then moved with her husband to Sheikh Maqsood neighborhood in Aleppo. With the battles between the different parties of the Syrian conflict reaching the city, they ended up being refugees in Lebanon.

Sabah said, «Syrian Kurds manage their affairs on their own, we do not feel that we are very welcome amongst the Kurds of Lebanon,» and added that they did not receive any support from local Kurdish bodies, except for some aid that they used to receive occasionally through UNHCR. Sabah counts her days waiting for the completion of «family reunification»

paperwork by her husband, who had left Lebanon nearly a year and a half ago seeking asylum in Germany.

The locations of Kurdish refugees are concentrated in the areas of Bourj Hammoud, Nabaa, and Bourj El-Barajneh camp, and the rest of the families are distributed among other areas.

### Figures and Statistics

The latest UNHCR reports indicate that there are about 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon, while official sources say that there are more than 1.5 million refugees.

According to a source familiar with the Syrian refugee dossier in the municipality of Bourj Hammoud, it is difficult to know the accurate figures of Syrian minorities present in Lebanon, as some of them are well-off or have ties to Lebanese families that host them, so they do not ask for relief or register with UNHCR or civil society organizations. Others entered illegally, and others were still present in Lebanon before the start of the Syrian crisis in search of work opportunities. In addition, many families and individuals are leaving to settle in foreign countries and, consequently, the figures are in a state flux.

### Refugees, but only for a while

Many of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Syria's neighboring countries seek to travel to more developed and stable countries to start a new life and build a better future, away from the situation in Syria and the pressures they face in the neighboring countries.

Turkey was the main crossing gateway

for all those dreaming of reaching the European continent via illegal ways.

The chances of Syrian refugees in Lebanon of traveling to Turkey, a transit country to the old continent, have shrunk after the Turkish government issued in 2015 a series of decisions limiting the Syrians' ability to travel to it without obtaining a visa through the embassy, which often rejects applications. So now the only chance for immigration is through submitting a formal application through the embassies of the foreign countries of their destination or through UNHCR, which helps resettle a certain number of refugees registered with it every year, in coordination with the countries that will receive them.

In our discussion of Syrian ethnic minorities in Lebanon, it should be noted that some have privileges over the rest of their countrymen in their chances of obtaining formal immigration approval. An owner of one of the offices that provide services to submit and follow-up on immigration applications for Syrian refugees said that chances of applications by Christians getting approved are higher than those for the rest of the communities, whereby obtaining a «baptism certificate» from the church and attaching it to the immigration application has become necessary to boost chances of being accepted.

He went on to say that most of the applications were currently being submitted to Australia and Canada, and that Assyrians and Syriac Christians are the most likely to obtain approval.

\* Syrian journalist



# Towards a disciplinary approach to History Education: the experience of the Lebanese Association for History (LAH)

Dr. Bassel Akar\*

Dr. Maha Shuayb\*\*

Nayla Hamadeh\*\*\*

**Despite a national agreement over unified history textbooks, stipulated in the Ta'ef Agreement and four major attempts by the Lebanese Government to produce a history curriculum, the history curriculum has not been reformed since 1971.**

Against this background, the Lebanese Association for History, is an initiative on behalf of a group of history educators and academics to fill in the gap and advance an approach to history as a discipline. This approach stresses that a consensual narrative is contra to the nature of history, or even an oxymoron. A single narrative limits opportunities to nurture historical thinking and prepare individuals to think critically and creatively about issues affecting their current lives. The existing single narrative, used in most Lebanese schools, provides children with no opportunity to do what historians do, like search for evidence, question interpretations and answer big questions. Instead, they learn only to remember information in order to recite for exams. Another approach to learning history exists. It is through this disciplinary approach that children learn the science of thinking and behaving as responsible historians. LAH's mission is to introduce this approach into Lebanon's values of advancing education to higher standards and fostering a generation of individuals capable of managing difficult and complex understandings of our history of diversity, conflict and change.

Change happens at many levels. At the policy level, we have gridlock. Therefore, our mission at LAH is to begin the change at the grassroots level, with teachers. We do not aim to change practices of all history teachers in Lebanon. Instead, our theory of change is a much longer yet sustainable process. We believe that change happens when teachers become experts by learning through their practice. We work with teachers who find great interest and value in children historical mysteries that question causes, changes and other historical concepts. We invest in these teachers. Countries around the world, whether developed or affected by armed-conflict, have shown that these high-impact teachers learn to become curriculum writers that governments value and rely on during the curriculum design and production phases. So, our vision is to shift from learning history using only one story to learning history as a discipline by supporting teachers in professional development to become high-impact agents of curricular change. LAH is focusing on two main strategies to ensure that change takes place. On one hand, we are advancing a disciplinary approach to history education; on the other, we are focusing on highly motivated teachers who are willing to make and lead the change.

In Lebanon, we have tried to teach the students history

through a single narrative approach. Through this, students have one version of history that has been carefully constructed and that has acquired a kind of «national» consensus at some point in time. This approach presents only one narrative or story of the past, history is factual not problematic, children only learn how to remember events and accounts, and to reproduce them exactly as they appear in textbooks without any personal enquiries, interpretations or reconstructions of the past. Indeed, they do the exact opposite of what historians do. Historians answer genuine questions about the past by examining evidence and different interpretations using historical concepts that require higher levels thinking. So, while a single narrative approach tries to bring communities together by remembering a set of historical events that a group of people find to be free of conflict, children miss out on learning experiences rich in critical thinking and collaborative learning. Instead, they only learn how to reproduce others' interpretations of the past, which is a practice that contrasts any democratic form of living. A disciplinary approach to learning history requires that children demonstrate their abilities to read information responsibly and use historical concepts to make arguments using evidence. Some fundamental historical concepts include (1) causation (explaining what caused an event); (2) change and continuity (describing changes that took place); (3) significance (examining what was important for whom); and (4) similarities and differences (comparing and contrasting). A classroom model that focuses on history as a discipline involves focused conversations among learners, collaboration in the process of exploration, development of communication and problem solving skills, and expansion of the moral and ethical spectrum of the young learners. This approach is currently adopted in many developed countries. However, countries that have experienced wars like Lebanon have also succeeded in shifting from a single

narrative approach to a disciplinary one such as Cyprus and Northern Ireland. This shift took many years, and in many cases highly motivated teachers who struggled to make the change in their classrooms eventually won the confidence of their governments and wrote their national history curriculum. This is why our second strategy is to work with teachers who are highly motivated because they are essentially the curriculum writers.

Since its creation in 2013, LAH has organised a number of professional development activities and programs focusing on historical thinking involving hundreds of teachers. In the first phase, we have focused on a small group of motivated teachers who went through an intensive full-year training program that enabled them to shift their teaching by adopting a disciplinary approach and to produce educational units that focus on the development of historical thinking. This first phase also resulted in the identification of three novice trainers who joined the LAH team in phase II. In this second phase, LAH aimed at spreading regionally. A module consisting of three full-days workshops was offered in Baakline, Tripoli, and Kfarjawz. One hundred twenty history teachers participated in this program that provided an introduction to historical thinking and strategies to apply it in the history classroom. Interest was raised among teachers who realised that there is a path out of the curricular deadlock and a chance to develop history teaching in spite of the conflicts that keep appearing on the national level. The third phase that will be launched during the 2016–2017 academic year will provide once again a more focused and intensive training to a group of forty history teachers, identified as highly motivated and capable. The aim is to enlarge the training team thus to provide a core team that can be eventually at the service of the ministry of education in the process of the making of the history curriculum, and its implementation.

## Successes and challenges

Since LAH started its journey, there have been stories of success and failure which provide much food for thought for any future attempts to develop history education in Lebanon. One of the success stories resembles in the courage of one of the teachers Amira Hariri to address the causes of the Lebanese war by building and applying an enquiry based unit. As Christine Council from the University of Cambridge who led the teacher training

**Change happens at many levels. At the policy level, we have gridlock. Therefore, our mission at LAH is to begin the change at the grassroots level, with teachers**



programme in 2014, put it «her [Amira's] students were able to use disciplinary thinking, in a purposeful way, to find the necessary intellectual distance and rigour with which to discuss a complex and contentious topic of immense importance in her own country. I began to see that a disciplinary approach had given her the intellectual tools to assist her moral courage». This teacher was supported by her school administration to try a new approach to teaching history. While some teachers were able to take courageous steps to move away from the one narrative history, others found it more challenging. Some participants were often very taken with the innovative and active pedagogies that

were used to model approaches to historical thinking [...] sometimes, however, these were mistaken as the core purpose, rather than their curricular object – historical thinking or historical argument. Many were preoccupied with implementing and finishing the textbook on time. Some teachers were reluctant to challenge and revisit their practices. Others were sceptical about students' abilities to construct their own interpretations of historical events. Having the humility to question one's practice was a key challenge to trying new ways of teaching history. While we know that we have a long way to achieve our objective of revising the discipline of history and

depoliticising it, we know a bottom up and collaborative approach with policy makers is going to make this journey shorter and more successful. For that we count on courageous history teachers and historians as well as policy makers who are willing to revisit decades of conventional thinking which have been stifling progress in this field.

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\*\* Director of Centre for Lebanese Studies  
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All authors are founding members of  
the Lebanese Association for History



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# The Impact of the Marginalization of Social Cohesion in Secondary Schools on Students' Political, Social and Civic Views in Lebanon

Dr. Maha Shuayb\*

There has been plenty of discussions in Lebanon on the importance of strengthening social cohesion following the civil war and the need to introduce values of democracy and human rights in the official Lebanese curriculum. The Taif Agreement in 1989 emphasized the importance of education in promoting social cohesion. The Educational Centre for Research and Development (ECRD) developed in 1997 a new official curriculum focusing on fostering national unity, strengthening the sense of national belonging and promoting cultural and religious openness through citizenship education and unification of textbook. The state succeeded in developing new unified textbooks for all subjects except history, while the teaching of religious education became optional and to be decided by the principal of each school. The Taif Agreement and the educational policies emphasized the discourse that sectarianism is the key cause of war and conflict in Lebanon, while there was little mention of the role of social justice and the economic and class aspects in strengthening social cohesion. This leads us to consider the definition of social cohesion.

In their definitions, academics agree that social cohesion can be summed up as a bond that brings individuals of a community together and influences their behavior. In spite of this general definition, there is no consensus among academics on the components of social cohesion. One view focuses on the fact that social cohesion represents the shared values and narrowing disparities in wealth and income (source), that it is the ongoing process of society development and the creation of common values and challenges (source), and that social justice is an essential factor in social cohesion. Another view diminishes the importance of the need for having common values in society to achieve social cohesion, given that this trend could lead to injustice towards marginalized groups and minorities that do not necessarily share the values of the majority of the members of society. The latter focuses on the importance of social justice to achieve social cohesion. With regard to Lebanon's experience in promoting social cohesion after the Taif Agreement, more than 20 years have passed since this experiment; which calls for examining the role of schools in promoting social cohesion and its influence on students' attitudes. Thus, this research study titled "The Impact of Marginalization of Social Cohesion in Secondary Schools on Students' Political, Social and Civic Views in Lebanon" was conducted by the Centre for Lebanese Studies in 2010 and whose results we summarize in the present article. The full paper can be consulted on the Centre's official website. The study aimed to investigate the approaches practiced in secondary schools in Lebanon for promoting social cohesion and their possible impact on students' political and religious opinions and social values. The study sample included 24 Lebanese private (faith and secular) and public schools with various confessional and religious components. Interviews were conducted with students, teachers and principals, in addition to a survey in the form of a questionnaire administered to students relating to their political views and to learn about their values, attitudes and civic knowledge.

## Research methodology

The study surveyed the views of 24 principals, 62 teachers and 900 Grade 11 students in 24 public and 14 private secondary schools, both secular and religious. Schools were selected to represent the entire religious and political spectrum in Lebanon. Interviews were conducted with principals and teachers of national and citizenship education, history and social studies to explore how the schools addressed the mentioned subjects and to learn about pedagogies, school environment, extra-curricular activities as well as the school-community relationship and the extent of the participation of students, teachers and

parents in the school. A questionnaire targeting students was carried out to learn about their values, attitudes and citizenship knowledge. The questionnaire included several dimensions that examined young people's view on the current pedagogies and school environment to explore their role in influencing and shaping the young people's social and political attitudes.

## Approaches to social cohesion in Lebanon practiced in secondary schools

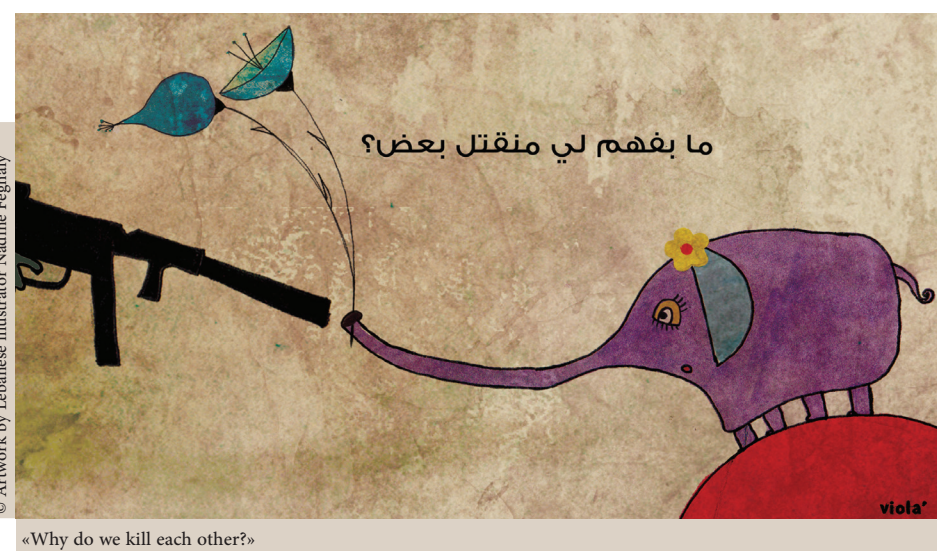
Five different approaches to social cohesion were identified: passive, avoidance, extra-curricular, multidimensional and paradoxical.

The passive approach was identified in nine of the 24 surveyed schools. It is an approach that does not emphasize the topic of social cohesion, as, according to the principals of those schools, it was not important for the management since all students belonged to the same sect. These schools limited their concept or understanding of social cohesion to multi-sectarian communities while other influencing factors, such as equality and justice, were absent. The prime objective of these schools was achieving high success rates in official exams. They also restricted social cohesion to teaching the subject of citizenship education. Their teaching methods were primarily didactic and focused on rote learning. The school-community relationship was limited and sometimes non-existent.

The avoidance model was identified in schools where the students population belonged to different confessional or political backgrounds as the school management opted for suppressing or avoiding any potential sectarian or political conflict amongst students as a means for promoting social cohesion. Classroom discussions and debates were banned in classrooms and playgrounds. The pedagogies were characterized by teaching social studies by narration, didactic teaching and rote learning. Extra-curricular activities were also limited in order to avoid any potential politicization.

On the other hand, schools that adopted the extra-curricular approach relied on extra-curricular activities as their prime means for promoting social cohesion. This included organizing trips to various regions in Lebanon, community services and social clubs. However, there were some shortcomings in the way these schools undertook these activities. These activities were random and not organized, and their goals were not set out or followed up. The pedagogy applied in the teaching of citizenship education and sociology was predominantly didactic and focusing on rote learning. The school's priorities were achieving good results in examinations.

A small number of schools (three) practiced the multidimensional approach, which focused



«Why do we kill each other?»

on inclusiveness as one of the conditions for strengthening social cohesion. These schools implemented a policy that admitted students from different social groups, allocates a budget for scholarships and integrated students with special needs. They also coordinated a program of extra-curricular activities and promoted the culture of democracy through elected student councils. They also established a school-community relationship as a mean to spread social cohesion. The pedagogy in teaching sociology was characterized by critical thinking as well as didacticism. The managements of these schools reflected the characteristics of democracy and participation by providing students with opportunities to express their opinions and applied a multidimensional approach for school development. The schools that followed the paradoxical approach were faith schools where students and the teaching staff were of the same sect, meaning that students did not get chances to mingle with other denominations. These schools stressed the social cohesion program within the same community, developing a program for developing students' citizenship skills through classroom and extra-curricular activities that were mostly didactic.

## The impact of the different approaches on students' social and political views

After surveying the various approaches followed by these secondary schools in Lebanon to reinforcing social cohesion, the students' political, social and citizenship attitudes were surveyed. It was revealed that in the schools that adopted the passive, avoidance and paradoxical approaches, young people were more inclined towards sectarianism and less willing to

socialize with students from other sects. They also showed a tendency to support politicians who belong to their own sect and confidence in sectarian parties. In comparison, their peers in secondary schools that adopted the comprehensive and extra-curricular approaches demonstrated secular views and were more reluctant to join sectarian parties. The analysis did not reveal any differences between state and private schools on the surveyed issues. The study showed that the passive approach was prevalent in the largest number of state schools, while the paradoxical approaches were mainly adopted in the private faith schools sampled in the study.

## Conclusion

The study showed that most of the teachers and principals have a narrow understanding of social cohesion that is limited to sectarian pluralism and citizenship literacy and does not include the concept of justice. The study found that the approaches adopted by schools have an effect on the political and social attitudes of students. The schools following the passive approach are characterized by a hierarchical and undemocratic structure and have limited approaches for promoting social cohesion. In addition, their students have sectarian tendencies and show loyalty to parties and leaders belonging to the same sect. On the other hand, schools that follow the extra-curricular and multidimensional approaches are characterized by a more democratic environment and encourage the students' intellectual development, which can help them face the challenge of the sectarian heritage in their communities and can strengthen social cohesion more so than the other approaches.

\* Director of Centre for Lebanese Studies

# Large-Scale Negative Repercussions of the Syrian Crisis on Lebanon... While the Airport Is Going its Own Way

Salwa Baalbaki\*

It is not surprising that Lebanon has been the country most affected by the Syrian crisis, which has been going strong for around 5 years, as its geographical location adjacent to Syria has turned it into its vital flank. Therefore, it is only natural that Lebanese economic growth would drop from 8% in 2010 to 2% in 2011, the year the Syrian crisis started. In addition, the GDP lost roughly USD 15 billion between 2011 and 2015. And according to economist Ghazi Wazni, this loss is expected to reach 20 million by the end of 2016.

The Syrian crisis has been a pivotal stage in the Lebanese course due to the negative repercussions it has caused at the economic, financial, political and social levels; the report published by the World Bank is only proof of the scale of the catastrophe that has hit Lebanon. The report said that the Syrian crisis had cost Lebanon more than USD 10 billion, distributed among healthcare bills, which cost for every Syrian displaced more than USD 450, and education bills, as Lebanese public schools have taken in more than 450 thousand Syrian pupils against 350 thousand Lebanese. It has also affected unemployment, which has risen to 60% among the young aged between 23 and 26, according to the «Labora» for employment, not to mention its impact on Lebanese institutions as a result of the crowding of Syrian institutions that are operating randomly in Lebanon... However, and despite this gloomy outlook, there are exceptions, as there are institutions that have benefited from the Syrian crisis. This is the case with Beirut Airport according to a statement made to the An-Nahar daily by Head of Commercial Division of Middle East Airlines (MEA) Nizar Khoury. According to Khoury, traffic has been impacted positively due to the Syrians using Beirut Airport as an alternative to Damascus International Airport, pointing out that passenger traffic at the airport increased between January and July 2016 by about 6.8% over the same period in 2015. This movement had peaked in 2014 and 2015 as it increased by 9.9%, but today its pace has declined as a result of the imposed visa measures (it should be noted that Syrians use the airline's network and most of them travel to Jordan, Turkey and some Arab countries). With the increasing numbers of travelers using the airport, the figure is expected to go up to about 7,700,000 in 2016, an increase of 7% over 2015 (7,204,000). Khoury noted, «The capacity of the airport has reached its maximum limits in terms of passenger arrivals and departures, and must promptly undertake the expansion of infrastructure.»

The coup attempt in Turkey had a negative impact on Beirut Airport, as Khoury pointed out that passenger traffic on carriers between Beirut and Turkey dropped by 30%.

## Wazni: An Increase in Revenues from Airline Ticket Taxes and Fees

According to the Department of Research, Studies and Documentation of the

Ministry of Tourism, the total number of Syrian arrivals via Beirut Airport in 2012 were about 121,091, and in 2013 they numbered 314,889; an increase of 160%. In 2014, the figure dropped slightly to 303,182 and in 2015 the figure dropped further to 263,618. In 2016, there were 195,652 up to July.

These figures came as no surprise to the economist Ghazi Wazni, who said to the An-Nahar daily that the Syrian crisis and the risks of travelling from Damascus have made Beirut Airport a point of transition for a large number of displaced Syrians and businessmen going abroad. In addition, the use of the airport has had positive effects on MEA whose number of passengers increased significantly, and this has also reflected positively on state revenues from the fees and taxes charged on airline tickets. Another positive aspect mentioned by Wazni was related to Syrian businessmen who use Beirut Airport, some of whom spend several days in Lebanon, staying at hotels in Beirut before travelling to their final destinations.

Whereas the Syrian crisis has had repercussions on Lebanon, the transitory Turkish crisis has not impacted Lebanon,

either positively or negatively. According to Wazni, this is due to the fact that Turkish tourism to Lebanon and investments are virtually non-existent. However, there has been a decline in trade due to the closure of border crossings.

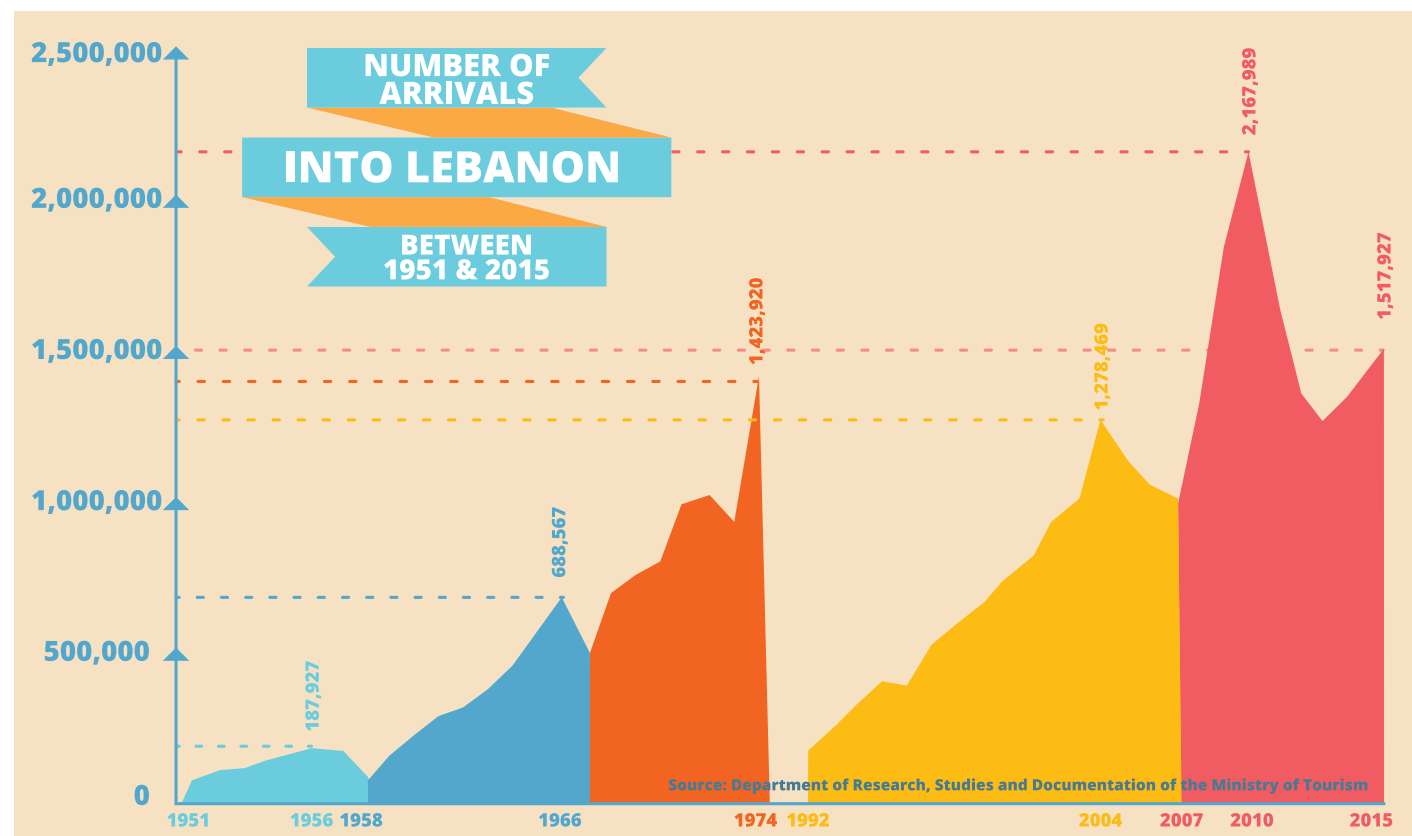
## Ghobril: Beirut Airport is the Most Suitable Gateway for Syrians

The reestablishment of political stability and proper security conditions in Lebanon in May 2008 with the Doha Accord helped to revive tourism activity in the country, as the number of incoming tourists increased by 31% in 2008, by 39% in 2009 and by 17% in 2010. In parallel, passenger traffic at the Hariri International Airport, i.e. the number of arrivals and departures, increased by 21.4% in 2008, by 23% in 2009 and by 11% in 2010. more specifically, the number of arrivals rose by 21% in 2008, by 23% in 2009 and by 11% in 2010, which means that the number of arrivals increased by 1.1 million persons between 2007 and 2010, while the number of tourists reached 2.16 million in 2010.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in March 2011, tourism activity in Lebanon regressed significantly, with the

number of visitors falling by 24% in 2011 and by an additional 17.5% in 2012 and 7% in 2013, resulting in a decline of 894,000 visitors between 2010 and 2013, which constitutes a decline of 41% in the same period. It is logical that activity at the Hariri International Airport movement would be affected by this sharp decline, as the airport is the main gateway for the overwhelming majority of tourists coming to Lebanon.

But the decline in tourist arrivals was not accompanied by a decline in the airport's traffic, as the number of arrivals and departures at the airport rose by 27.4% in 2011, while the number of tourist arrivals fell by 24% that same year. In addition, the number of departures from the Hariri International Airport increased by 28% and the number of arrivals rose by 27% in 2011, while transit passengers via the airport grew by 85.5%. Accordingly, the number of arrivals to Lebanon through the airport reached 3.5 million, while the number of departures from it was 3.52 million in 2011, two record highs when compared to the number of airport users during the tourism boom between 2008 and 2010.



«This considerable rise in airport traffic» according to Nassib Ghobril, the Chief Economist and Head of Economic Research and Analysis Department of the Byblos Bank Group, «is due to the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in March 2011, the deterioration of the security situation in that country, the targeting of the Damascus International Airport and the roads leading to it, and the foreign airlines ceasing gradually their flights to Syria, which forced a large number of Syrians to use the Hariri International Airport due to the geographical proximity of Damascus to Beirut and the large number of Arab and foreign airlines that use the Beirut airport and, consequently, to the large number of flights and the existence of flight connections via Beirut to major European capitals and cities, and to other destinations in North and South America and Australia, and other countries and regions.» He added, «The skill and experience of the Lebanese travel agencies and Middle East Airlines have helped promptly and without delays to provide seats on board aircrafts, tickets and travel programs requested by Syrian citizens.»

This trend continued in 2012, as the

**the Syrian crisis and the risks of travelling from Damascus have made Beirut Airport a point of transition for a large number of displaced Syrians and businessmen going abroad. In addition, the use of the airport has had positive effects on MEA whose number of passengers increased significantly**

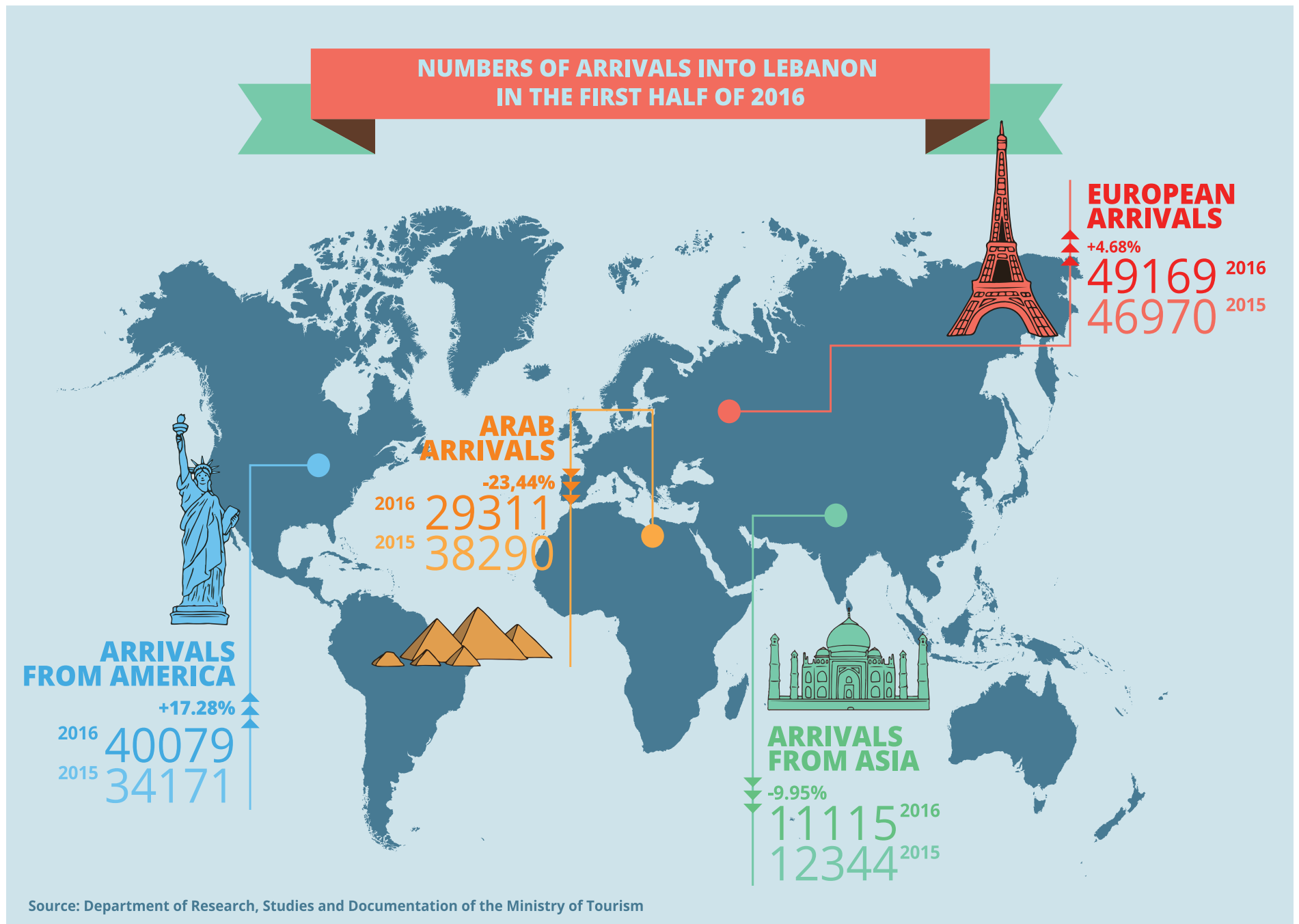
number of departures from the Beirut airport reached 3 million and the number of arrivals 2.9 million. They are also two figures that exceed the number of arrivals and departures in 2010, which was the best tourism year in Lebanon's modern history. Accordingly, the number of departures and arrivals via Beirut's airport reached 5.9 million in 2012. Although this figure constitutes a 16% decline from the record high of 2011, it remained lower than the decline in the number of tourists of 17.5% in that same year.

The airport traffic was improved again in 2013, as the number of arrivals and departures reached 6.25 million, which is

a rise of 6% over 2012. Mr. Ghobril said, «The persisting conflict in Syria made the Hariri International Airport the most suitable gateway for a large number of Syrian citizens who were forced to flee to Lebanon and stay here, especially Syrian businessmen who want to conduct their business and continue to communicate with other parts of the world, as well as for a large number of Syrian families who used the Beirut Airport to emigrate,» adding, «In conjunction with the aggravation of the Syrian conflict and the high number of Syrians displaced to Lebanon, especially starting in 2013, the number of officials and employees of international foreign

relief agencies, NGOs, Arab and foreign charities, and various UN agencies staff arriving in Lebanon increased, in order to deliver aid to displaced Syrians through these organizations.» This contributed, in his opinion, to the rise in airport traffic. These figures take Ghobril back to the «objections that were raised at the time about the expansion of Beirut Airport in the late 1990s. Some considered that Lebanon will not be able to attract a sufficient number of travelers or tourists to justify the expansion works at the airport, only to discover years later the importance of the project. In fact, some stakeholders have demanded the expansion of the airport's capacities so it would be able to accommodate a bigger number of arrivals and departures, regardless of the relatively temporary repercussions of the Syrian conflict on the use of the airport.» Ghobril cited the «record figures» of the traffic via Beirut Airport, as the number of arrivals and departures in 2015 reached roughly 7.2 million, to reaffirm the need for and the importance of this project.

\* Lebanese journalist in An-Nahar newspaper



# Agriculture and Industry Suffer from the Lack of Specialized Syrian Labor

Hassan El Haf\*

Despite the strong dose of incitement that runs through the statements of some Lebanese politicians against Syrian labor in Lebanon, and despite the fact that successive governments have not, since the outbreak of the Syrian war, come up with well thought-out policies to receive Syrian refugees, the statements made by the most prominent representatives of Lebanese economic sectors contradict many of the widely-shared stereotypes.

The main sectors in Lebanon are experiencing a lack in Syrian specialized labor that now prefers to emigrate to Europe, America, and Canada, where demand for it is high and where working conditions are much better. In addition, a large number of Syrian workers prefer to stay in Syria rather than return to Lebanon and incur expenses that they cannot sustain.

This comes following the Lebanese Ministry of Labor's decision to impose entry visas and work permits on Syrian labor whereby workers incur the bulk of the costs because a large number of employers refuse to take on most of these expenses, according to what the Minister of Labor Sejaan Azzi said in several statements. The annual report published by the Ministry of Labor for 2015 shows that out of 60,814 work permits, 1,102 new work permits were granted to Syrians in the past year. The number of renewed permits reached 1,048 permits for Syrians, out of a total of 148,860. The figures are relatively low compared with the total number of Syrian workers in Lebanon, the fact which reveals that the desired objective behind issuing these permits has not been achieved.



© Alia Haju

## Agriculture: A Big Crisis

According to the president of the Lebanese Farmers Association Antoine Howayek, «The Syrian crisis has caused the Lebanese agricultural sector many problems, especially regarding labor, where some workers have stopped returning from Syria after going there to see their families.» Howayek added, «The displaced who have come to Lebanon after the crisis have increased the number of Syrian workers in Lebanon but the number of specialists in agriculture has dropped significantly while the number of those willing to work in any field in search of a livelihood to meet their needs and those of their families has increased.»

Howayek explained, «The percentage of specialized agricultural workers has declined over the last five years by more than half,» noting that the imposition of sponsorships, or «kafala», and work permits on Syrians has created a big problem especially regarding seasonal labor, which is the most prevalent form of labor and the one witnessing the most demand. «The demand is mostly for workers for a few months whereas the «kafala» has to be paid for a year.»

Howayek explained that the bulk of the specialized workers have an illegal status, as more than 70% of them are without work permits, which hinders their movement between regions for fear of being arrested, noting that «there is a decline in Syrians coming to work in

agriculture in comparison with the past, since those who work in agriculture also work in the construction sector, which has raised the level of wages in the sector as a whole. In addition, there is increased interest of Syrian workers in artisanal handicraft.»

According to Howayek, «The cost has increased in recent years by roughly 50 percent compared to previous levels, this has been caused by the closing down of land transport and the high cost of export by sea, which has led to great stagnation across the sector.» The sector has seen a decline as a whole (exports and revenues) at the end of 2015 by 37 percent over 2014.

## The Archaeology Sector: A Good Situation

The decline in the agricultural sector was not paralleled in the archaeological sector, which relies greatly on a Syrian workforce. Informed sources in the Ministry of Culture explained that the number of Syrian workers in comparison to the total number of workers in the archaeological sector is very high, as the Directorate of Antiquities encourages Syrian workers to come to the sector, and they come in second place in terms of importance after Lebanese workers. They are also given preference compared to other nationalities working in this sector.

The source explained that excavation works are divided into two parts: regular and specialized, noting that the sector has

not seen any problems or complaints lately in either category.

Although he denied that any statistical data is available on the workers in the sector, he said that the situation was very acceptable, noting that the worker crews in the archaeological sector were not of the same size as those of the agricultural sector, since the archaeological sector is very small in comparison and its crews usually number in the dozens and not in the thousands.

## Industry: Lebanon is a Stop for Specialized Labor

The former head of the Association of Industrialists, and also the former Minister of Tourism, Fadi Abboud, in turn, denied any crisis at the level of the regular workers in the sectors of construction, agriculture, and industry in general, where the number of these workers is very high. However, the crisis begins to emerge noticeably among technicians and machinists (such as lathe machinists) specializing in industrial machinery.

Abboud pointed out that immigration is open to specialists more than any other workers, noting that a large part of these, especially engineers, have emigrated to Europe, and Germany in particular, and some to America and Canada.

Abboud explained that there is a global shortage in «molds sorters» in factories, indicating that specialized labor has been coming to Lebanon lately as a temporary

stop for a few months, waiting for their paperwork to be completed and submitted to an embassy as global demand is very high for such skills.

Abboud pointed out that the salaries of workers are on the rise especially those of technicians, which brings up production costs to a large extent, explaining that this shortage is not limited to Syrian workers but also applies to Lebanese technicians. Abboud identified the shortage at the level of the mechanical industry and the molding industry in particular, noting that the industrial sector situation differs to a large degree from other sectors.

Abboud said, «The misfortunes of some are the fortunes of others. The Syrian crisis has had positive repercussions on some industries. But government policies have disrupted these benefits, especially when it comes to the high cost of shipping by sea, which increased by almost half in comparison with land transport.» According to Abboud too, this was due to the «port's thefts».

He pointed out that the benefits came down in the increased demand for Lebanese industries in Lebanon, due to the increase in the number of residents and the increase for them in the Arab world, noting the decline in a fierce competition that Syrian factories once posed for Lebanese factories.

\*Lebanese journalist

# Diaries of Syrian farmers

Alia Haju\*

**Over large areas of agricultural lands in the plains of the Bekaa, we see many farmers hard at work on this land. These farmers are mostly Syrians who were displaced by the internecine war in their country. We do not come across many Lebanese farmers, as Lebanese workers refuse to work in agriculture because of the low wages, the harsh work conditions and the lack of serious government policies supporting the agricultural sector.**

«Before the war, we used to work seasonally in the cultivation of land in the Bekaa, we used to plant these lands before the war and we weren't refugees then. We now suffer from difficult living conditions, low wages, ill treatment and exploitation by those in charge of the labor market,» says Karim, 27, a Syrian farmer who has fled the war and works in agriculture. Women work alongside men in land cultivation and this kind of participation goes back to Syria, as these families need additional income. But with these families being displaced outside of Syria, and into Lebanon in particular, work conditions have become increasingly difficult for women. Alaa', one of the women working in agriculture, says, «I work from six in the morning and get back at seven in the evening. We are forced to stay out all these long hours so we can survive in winter when there's only cold and sitting around. We cultivate the land, grow vegetables and fruits and whatever work we can get. The daily wage for all these hours is LL 8,000, but the shawish responsible for finding us work takes LL 2,000 from each farmer, so we get only LL 6,000.»

Alaa' is sixteen years old and comes from Rif Aleppo (Aleppo's countryside). She cannot write or read. Her home was bombed and turned to rubble and she now lives with her family of eleven in a small tent. Alaa' adds, «I'm getting married next month, I dream of

a good house and a decent life; I dream of visiting Damascus that I've never visited before.»

The harsh conditions of war and displacement have greatly affected children who also work in agriculture, as many children are involved in the cultivation of these lands. Mustafa, 11, works the land with his family too.

«I don't really remember Aleppo; I know Lebanon more than I do Aleppo. I've never been to school and I can't write or read. I know how to write 'Allo' on WhatsApp. I love working the land and I'm happy here in Lebanon, I have many Lebanese friends. I love Lebanon and Syria and I would like to go back home... I dream of having everything.»

The situation in Syria has become very complicated and the prolonged conflict is weighing on the presence of Syrians working in various sectors. The small size of Lebanon as a host country and the absence of real support and a clear international plan have had terrible repercussions on the stay of Syrian workers.

Karim adds, «The Lebanese are unhappy about our presence here although there is no piece of arable land that has been cultivated or residences built without Syrian labor taking part in building it.»

\* Photojournalist



Alaa (R), 16, a Syrian refugee from Aleppo, displays produce she picked with her cousin during work in a grape field in Kefraya, Bekaa Valley



Mustapha, 11, a Syrian refugee from Aleppo, reacts while carrying baskets during work in a grape field in Kefraya, Bekaa Valley



Grapes, which are later used for wine, are pictured in Kefraya, Bekaa Valley



A Syrian refugee girl, 7, eats a tomato while she helps her family work in harvesting tomatoes in the Bekaa Valley



A Syrian refugee woman from Aleppo works in harvesting tomatoes in the Bekaa Valley



Packaging bell peppers



Syrian refugee farmers working in harvesting tomatoes in the Bekaa Valley



Syrian refugee farmers working in harvesting tomatoes in the Bekaa Valley



A general view shows Syrian refugee farmers working in harvesting tomatoes in the Bekaa Valley

## Beirut and I

**Lina Hwayan El-Hasan\***

Here in Lebanon, the houses, palaces, streets, buildings, towns, and cities bear the scars of war, the sad legacy usually left behind by internecine civil wars.

I have been living here for four years. I spent the first year in the mountain town of Aley and I spent three months in the town of Bhamdoun.

I arrived in Lebanon without determining my destination. Most of my writer colleagues had submitted political asylum applications in order to reach Europe.

The idea itself was terrifying to me. I cannot go too far away from Damascus, and thus I settled in Lebanon. Maybe I chose Aley for a year for its proximity to the Damascus route—it was enough for me to see Syrian cars on the highway with «Damascus» written on the plate on the back of the car to be put at ease.

The first year went by without me undertaking any activity besides walking, and writing. I would take advantage of the sunny days in Aley's harsh winter to traverse those paths shaded by ancient perennial trees, trees that have witnessed a dirty war like the one raging in my homeland Syria.

I left my homeland sad, confused and somewhat lost and my daily walks saved me from a breakdown. During my daily excursions, I was struck by those beautiful abandoned palaces, battered by bullets, pitiful relics of bygone magnificence. Some palaces had kept the features of their former beauty, but stood deserted and neglected—

could it be because its masters had died or emigrated, or chosen an alternative homeland?

Before the tragic events that hit my homeland, I used to think that it would be hard for me to choose an alternative homeland. Later when I left fleeing possible death, I did not have many options other than stopping somewhere, and regarding it a home even if temporarily.

When I decided to reside in Beirut, I chose Bliss Street, to be close to the books – the Library of the American University was my only choice. At the same time, I was close to Hamra Street. I wanted to get to know the city of Beirut right from the «heart», from the ancient Ras Beirut district, Hamra's boulevards that bustle with cafés, restaurants, and bars, and also its proximity to the sea. The sea that I knew from the writings of Ghada Al-Samman, the Syrian author who had lived in Beirut in its years of fame and glory, and then witnessed the internecine war that destroyed the city.

I have come to know now the city of Beirut and its environs fairly well.

I feel wretched at the sight of my compatriots in the streets of Beirut as they go through their daily sufferings to merely subsist.

As soon as we leave our homeland, we discover the predicament that we will always experience with the identification documents crisis.

We have become the holders of an impaired passport

leaving us ineligible to travel to any Arab state.

As if «death» is the only thing available to Syrians.

Over the past four years, I have said goodbye to a large number of friends who passed through Beirut on their way to Turkey where death boats awaited them! Who can blame them? Death and poverty have beset most of them, their homes have been destroyed, so they have preferred adventure at sea to staying in undignified displacement camps.

Not a night goes by without a complaint message full of melancholy, sadness, and regret coming in from one of my friends who have emigrated.

Who said that we Syrians wish to replace our homeland with the forests of Germany or to take pictures with the ducks that swim in its rivers?

No one wishes to be away from his homeland, but death was a good reason to leave. When you run out of options and entire cities are destroyed and are ruled by various forms of tyranny—arguably the most brutal of which is ISIS, whose savagery has exceeded all other forms of barbarism in modern history.

Despite everything, I shall conclude my article with one word: «hope». Hope is the space which offers us patience and optimism of light at the end of the tunnel.

\* Syrian novelist residing in Beirut

## «Passing Through Beirut»

**Elias Sadkni\***

To Beirut...

From my heart, peace to Beirut...

Peace for a city that did not know much peace... No sooner had war ran out from her shelves, had it overflowed in our shops... So it has been an export and import...

Peace for a city bulging from an abundance of everything and depletion at once... Politics and its vacancy... Revolution and uselessness... Prosperity and vagrancy... Asylum and rightlessness...

A city bulging from an abundance of paucity... So it is life and agony...

Peace for a city whose communities are on an equal footing... Its roads and «ways» are crooked... Its camps are cities... Its suburbs are countries... Its bridges are prisons... And its sea exiled, not lapping its feet but on a grain of sand whose whiteness was almost tainted... So it is solitude and harmony...

Peace for a city where you can come across all kinds of humanity and discrimination... Secular and sectarian... Its walls filled with letters of love and exile ... Whose traders of labor have been honored with a medal of «no honor»... and given my name, Elias—in the area where I reside—a pass or «no conviction»... while my work has been the gateway to a world of humanitarian causes and to a number of believers in them and activists defending them... So it is liberation and slavery...

Peace for a city that no culture has left without settling safely amongst those who wish it and who reside in the city... Breathing life in corners, roads and hallways with art, an interest or a unique hobby... So it embraced them as a group of tribes practicing various rituals... So it is sound and image...

Peace to a city used to parting with sons who had taken their first steps in its alleys, who had learnt the alphabet at its desks, discovered love in its shades and dreamt of a cedar that would build them a homeland... And endlessly leaving it without regrets... So it is emancipation and nostalgia...

Peace to a city where between its high rises an old house is rooted here and there, left to grow old alone in its hideaway... Its sons have left holes for kisses on its forehead—in memory—before departing... Its balconies crumbling from the weight of time passing and its windows sagging in despair, once destined to cover its eyes so it could sleep... I walk by it and I hear it sigh in sorrow over the city's history choked with a rusty lock... and I see it faltering in anxiety over the day when the stones of its stories would be taken apart... to be replaced with steel and concrete that have never known... So it is history and apostasy...

To Beirut...

A wish and a greeting and nothing more...

For Beirut is not keen on embraces or perhaps has grown sick of lovers who had betrayed her... Today those who desire her are many but she fears them settling her heart... Its suffocating traffic... Its clamor... Their clamor... Drives me to flee... Creates an abyss in the soul that cannot be filled except with visions of the past as if a specter... So I return only to run away again... And the abyss grows and I find myself drowning in its specters ever more... as if it was a dream...

It sometimes happens that as I'm wandering the streets of Beirut I see my reflection in the glass of a passing car, and in an epiphany, I am alerted to the fact that I live here!

That was the strangest thing I could have imagined...

«I live in Beirut»!!!! It was neither a choice nor a coercion... That's how my relationship to Beirut is...

I don't know how it started, nor why it goes on...

Beirut is cruel...

Cruel for its proximity, cold as fear...

It gets crueller every time I return from a vagrancy and thought myself closer to that place... but found out that I was further by a life...

It is cruel for its blunt honesty... It does not flatter... It does not embellish the ugliness of the truth...

For no matter how I try to be close... I won't make it...

Yes, Beirut is cruel... But it is beyond tender... And I'm grateful to it...

I would be ungrateful if I isolate myself and blame her for my estrangement...

She has so many secrets that she opens to her residents—to those who seek—doors to life and to the self...

She has given me, the stranger, a space to dream and get lost... To look for myself every time her sun rises... To build myself a quasi-belonging in a quasi-asylum... To be the closest I can get to hope...

In her, I met a great number of friends that not even my homeland had offered me... I saw in them a homeland of human beings... They wept with me when I wept over my memories there... And we dreamt... So no border, visa or passport can steal our dreams...

My stay in Beirut has turned my world upside down... My stifling isolation, my solitude—albeit, relative—has brought me face to face with the question «why?» that I've always escaped... So I found myself panting in search of a new meaning... A new value for what we call «life»... and I still do...

So boundless gratitude from the heart, dear Beirut...

Not as a settled resident... but as a step on the way back... the way back to tomorrow... the tomorrow that is closer to the past...

Return there... To Aleppo... Peace, embraces, and all the nostalgia remain...

And hope that tomorrow is not filled with houses locked with waiting... their furniture is absence... their memories forgetfulness...

Their dormant memories today are orphaned without those to remember them... To revive them... To weep over them... Slumbering in a drawer, a box or a book.

\* Syrian humanitarian worker and Co-founder of «House of Peace»

# Country of Jasmine and Olives



«Land unites us and agriculture is a pillar of our civilization»

Artwork by the Lebanese artist and calligrapher Ghaleb Hawila

## The Return of the Tragedy

Michel Hajji Georgiou\*

The Syrian refugee crisis appears to be bringing out the worst in human beings. Indeed, everything seems to indicate that they are slowly, but surely, emerging as the perfect victim, the desired scapegoat to exorcise all the evils engendered by globalization in a number of societies, both Eastern and Western.

Before such a case in point, it is impossible not to think of the fire analysis of the academician René Girard of Oedipus of the Greek myth or that of Milomaki of the Yahuna Indians: two legendary personas persecuted and declared guilty by a mob of the evils plaguing their societies. They are in fact regarded as the outsiders who were at the root of the breakdown of the social and societal order that once prevailed.

Since the beginning of the Syrian tragedy, refugees are in turn perceived by a part of the population in host countries as the scourge at the root of every misfortune. Needless to say, moreover, that this existential angst that usually accompanies an identity crisis when faced with the arrival of the other, the one who is

different from us, is today fully exploited by some political forces and some officials, who have made intolerance and hate their electoral stock-in-trade and the foundation of their populist rhetoric in some countries, including Lebanon.

Never indeed was the return to primal instincts so powerful, so much so that the whole world is beset with terrible identity convulsions. The recent controversy over the burkini in France has crystallized, for that matter, this alarm, mixed with fears and tremors, with the identity bag of worms triggered by the Syrian crisis, in particular, and the massive exodus of refugees to Europe, in general. The world finds itself plunged into a deep and critical crisis relating to points of reference. The progress towards the universality of human rights, a construction built on the ruins of the post-1945 world and in operation since the second half of the 20th century, has never before been so undermined as with the powerlessness of the international community to put an end to the violence ravaging the Syrian territory.

This fixation abscess, where extremes clash, has already developed. Violence and extremism have now spread far and wide. The tumors born in Syria, and recreated in the region, are now causing a mimetic reaction of the rise in extremism—another name for the identity crisis—across the whole world.

Globalization is in agony before our eyes, in atrocious and bloody convulsions. The so-called «end of history», predicted with optimism by Fukuyama with the end of bipolarity in the early 1990s, is now going through the end of its own history. The world is, unquestionably, ripe for rethinking.

But, please, shall we spare the Syrian refugees who are innocent. Compromised unanimity in a society and eroded unity cannot necessarily be repaired at the expense of propitiatory victims. For this is, without a doubt, paving the way for new tragedies that we had thought long buried in the last century.

\* Lebanese journalist in L'Orient-Le Jour newspaper



The UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» project works since 2007 on enhancing mutual understanding and promoting social cohesion by addressing root causes of conflict in Lebanon. The project has been also lately working on addressing the impact of the Syrian crisis on social stability in Lebanon. The project supports different groups from local leaders and local actors, to educators, journalists, youth and civil society activists, in developing medium and long-term strategies for peace building, crisis management and conflict prevention.

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