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Special Edition

This supplement is produced by the UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» project, funded by Germany. The Arabic version is distributed with An-Nahar while the English version is distributed with The Daily Star and the French version with L'Orient-Le Jour. The supplement contains articles by writers, journalists, media professionals, researchers and artists residing in Lebanon. They cover issues related to civil peace in addition to the repercussions of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon and the relations between Lebanese and Syrians, employing objective approaches that are free of hatred and misconceptions.

When my friend asked those men how do they feel spending 12 hours on top of the city and the other 12 hours underground, the answer was: «We live 24 hrs underground!»

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© «Fear» printmaking artwork by Azza Abo Rebieh

A Calm and Rational Approach

What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of a job?
Will my weekends be work-free and paid for?
Will my workplace be secure and my colleagues respectable? Will I enjoy insurance and social security? Will I be paid regularly at the end of every month, and will I know whether or not I will still be working in a few months' time?
Not everyone can afford such expectations when being offered a new job. For a growing number of people around the world, this is merely a hope, maybe even a dream.
Getting closer to realizing this dream is a core objective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: «Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all» (Goal 8).
As the crisis in Syria becomes increasingly protracted, its impact on Lebanon deepens. Unemployment is ballooning and social tensions between different communities are emerging.
This is, however, one side of the story.
The other side shows ways to benefit from the Syrian workforce to positively contribute to the Lebanese economy, art scene, culture and social activities.
Dwarfed by the Syrian crisis and its repercussions on Lebanon, the media often forgets that side of the story.
This supplement in your hands presents both sides. The current issue is focusing on the Syrian workforce in particular, and trying to offer a calm and rational approach to an issue that is often seen as controversial. It also makes a case for finding innovative responses that would benefit both Lebanese and Syrians and help build the future of this young generation.

His Excellency Mr. Martin Huth, Ambassador
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Beirut

Syrian Refugees Primarily a Humanitarian Issue

The fate of the Syrian refugees is again under the spotlight in Lebanon. Several recent incidents have brought to the surface some resentment from local communities against them, sparking calls for their repatriation.
Some groups have called for talks with the Syrian regime to agree on the mechanism while other parties said that this was a matter for the United Nations.
This issue was and should remain to be primarily a humanitarian matter. The economic dimension of the crisis, and its heavy toll on the Lebanese economy, is well documented, but Lebanon can't simply send those refugees back in a haste.
The Lebanese would do well to remember how many people had to flee their homes during the 1975-90 civil war, or during the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon. They should feel the pain of those refugees and show more sympathy towards them.
Sure, a few Syrians here do pose a security threat, but so do a few Lebanese. Mistakes have happened, but that does not mean that Lebanon should wash its hands from its moral obligation, and duty, to look after them and to ensure that once they go back, they would be safe.
The safe return of those refugees, be it to safe zones in Syria or to their home, should be the responsibility of the international community. Until the United Nations decides its time for such a move, the international community should increase its aid to Lebanon and the Lebanese should show more sympathy and humility in dealing with them.

Nadim Ladki
Editor in Chief - The Daily Star

Putting Minds At Ease

Pending a lasting resolution to the Syria conflict, Lebanon finds itself managing – whether willingly or unwillingly – the massive presence of refugees on its soil. Actually, it has been managed neither willingly nor unwillingly, as it has not been managed at all, even making the State appear to care little for the issue. Apart from the extreme security vetting and an admittedly commendable effort in child schooling, the impression is that the authorities have delegated to international agencies and NGOs the hygiene, public health and economic integration of Syrian refugees.
Economic integration. Quite a big word for those fearing a permanent implantation, or settlement, of the displaced Syrians. But, instead of a reasonable exploration of the options that could be beneficial for the Lebanese economy and the Syrian refugees alike, the authorities have opted to do nothing, even though there are in-demand jobs in certain sectors.
Not until certain UN agencies gave out debit cards – even though they were limited to around USD 30 a month – as part of their programs to help displaced Syrians, were small Lebanese businesses revived. With roughly 700,000 refugees using these cards in Lebanon, these programs have been a boon for the small grocery stores struggling to get by.
The UN initiative was quick to whet the appetite of larger Lebanese companies: Three supermarket chains signed contracts with the World Food Programme, including the UCCM chain of cooperatives with 36 stores around the country. UCCM supermarkets have given Syrian refugees a 7% discount to attract them.
The mass of refugees who have fled the war in Syria is without a doubt a burden for Lebanon, which is already heavily indebted. But it should be noted that a significant number of these refugees contribute to the economy through their purchases and apartment rentals. What matters is gauging and, above all, admitting that beyond the difficulties that both sides face, cooperation is indispensable to put minds at ease.

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

Don't Punish Working Syrians

Syrian refugees do not bear responsibility for doing certain jobs in Lebanon and taking jobs from the Lebanese. Employers are ultimately Lebanese, and they are the ones who hire Syrian or other foreign workers to cut corners, playing on unemployment among Syrian refugees in particular. They take advantage of their need to earn a living by making them work in conditions that are often inhumane, according to a young Syrian man who works in a supermarket from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. for LBP 800,000, a wage that does not cover his rent or provide a decent living for his family. A Lebanese worker would do not accept such a salary in similar work conditions without guarantees, insurance or regular holidays.
I am not condemning the Lebanese worker, as he has the right to work in human and fair conditions. Neither am I defending job opportunities for refugees at the expense of the Lebanese who are going through difficult economic times. But the solution is not hostility and fomentation. Syrian unemployment can do more harm to Lebanon than hiring them for specific jobs, as it may lead to a «revolution of the hungry», not to mention higher rates of violence.
Solutions lie with State institutions – although they often underperform. Instead of punishing working Syrians, employers who replace the Lebanese with foreign workers and hire people without work permits should be punished. Instead of prohibiting Syrians from opening a shop, a bakery or any other small business legally, the requirements of obtaining a permit, meeting the necessary conditions and paying the taxes owed to the Treasury should be imposed. The country should not tighten the noose for itself under the pretext of fear, resettlement and camps. These are matters that cannot be resolved with quick fixes, but require a global vision and a national plan that has yet to be drawn up, but that – alas – may never see the light.

Ghassan Hajjar
Editor in Chief - An-Nahar newspaper

Opinion

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: How to Confront the Narrative of Exaggeration and Generalization

Nasser Yassin*

When covering the topic of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, commentators often, whether intentionally or unintentionally, make the same mistake of exaggerating and generalizing it. Many tend to exaggerate the burden of Syrian refugees far beyond the reality, which is, admittedly, by no means a minor issue. This exaggeration starts with inflaming the demography-related phobia inherent in the Lebanese and some communities in Lebanon. We read and hear dubious figures of Syrian annual births in Lebanon, some of which claim that they have crossed the 300,000 births per year mark, whereas in fact they are under 24,000, according to the UNHCR Data – constituting a departure from reality by a factor of 12, with all its ensuing demography-related panic. We also hear that all Syrians present in Lebanon are trained to use arms and can take control of the Lebanese territory, contradicting or denying statistical data that show that 80% of Syrians registered with the UNHCR are women and children.

Others aim to generalize. All Syrians have become shopkeepers and professionals who vie with the Lebanese for their livelihoods. In fact, a small number of Syrians, i.e. under 6%, have opened small businesses to earn their living, and a small number of them work in the liberal profession, according to the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon in 2016. Trivializing the humanitarian aspect of the refugee crisis, some assert that the majority of Syrians engage in selling the aid they receive and that they are constantly moving between their country of origin and their places of refuge. The reality, however, shows that vast majority of Syrians in Lebanon have fled violence of a scale that has rarely been seen before, with 71% living in poverty, according to the UNHCR, in debt to their relatives and Lebanese hosts, and struggling daily to provide for themselves and put food on the table for their families.

Very often, exaggeration and generalization are combined to create a recipe for disaster that promotes a narrative stirring up the demography-related phobia of certain Lebanese communities, imparts the imagination of the Lebanese regarding the invasion of an armed group to their community during the civil war, and resorts to fear mongering in relation to the Syrians by exaggerating their rivalry and competition with the Lebanese for their livelihoods. This story is complemented by stoking «terror» – a term used by a rising newspaper and republished by a leading television station – and using expressions such as explosion, time bombs and extinction – as insinuated in the headline of another prestigious newspaper.

It is very important to steer the debate back on the right course, away from populist agitation, exclusionary discourse and political stances that incite the masses and lay the groundwork for xenophobia and the rejection of Syrians and any 'other' who is not like 'us'. The approach to this issue should rather be scientific and professional, resorting to targeted strategies based on the local context and an outlook built on knowledge and reality. This is the role that the Government of Lebanon should play as part of a clear vision to take charge of this 'file' and find solutions; something that is still largely absent from its agenda.

This approach should begin by surveying and understanding the local context of the geography of Syrian displacement to Lebanon. Only then would we get a complete picture that most Syrians, who are poor and destitute, live in the poorest

© Artwork by Hamza Al Harriri

regions, towns and suburbs of Lebanon. They rent modest houses and work in the sectors they have been used to working in before the crisis, such as construction, agriculture and other jobs that the Lebanese have abandoned and entrusted to poor workers from other countries, with the number of Syrian entering workforce having increased following the crisis. These host communities, as the UN refers to them, were underprivileged to start with, and historically forgotten by the Lebanese «center» and its institutions. The vulnerability of the local economy and the lack of opportunities in the Bekaa, North, South, and the suburbs of Beirut and Tripoli are not something new, but they have been exposed and foregrounded by the influx of a large number of Syrian refugees.

Our outlook should also be based on scientific facts and statistics, and, as already mentioned, based on an understanding of the local context, so that an outlook based on knowledge and a historical analysis of the political economy of these geographies of displacement will help us determine the actual reality of the crisis and the possible scenarios. The most important of which is perhaps assessing the economic and social fault lines in refugee host communities that are likely to emerge if they remain overlooked by policymakers.

The most prominent fault lines are likely to emerge among younger age groups that do not have university or vocational education. These fault lines are likely to deepen as a result of increased competition for jobs that are already lacking or non-existent. Throughout their history, the state institutions in Lebanon have not accorded systematic and serious attention to the issue of job creation for young people, especially in the disadvantaged areas currently hosting Syrians. Maybe the little statistical data available can illustrate the heart of the problem. Of the 23,000 jobs Lebanon needs each year, only 3,400 jobs are created as per the World Bank, the reality that leads to the migration of many young people, especially the educated, constituting a great loss for Lebanon in human capital. The lack of jobs drives many young people to work in the informal sector, with half of Lebanon's active population working without a contract or social security. This situation has been compounded by the entry of a large number of Syrian young people into the labor market at an early age as a result of school dropouts and their need to support their families financially or provide for them.

One of the likely social consequences of this fault line is the risk of tension between young people (Lebanese and Syrians, Syrians and Palestinians, Syrians and Syrians etc..). A feeling of fierce competition for the few job opportunities would be the breeding ground for friction and clashes. What is most dangerous is the stoking of this feeling with racist rhetoric blaming the refugees and referring to them as «livelihood robbers». This sense of insecurity may increase the hostility of Syrians and lead to violence in some, which has already begun to appear in some areas and neighborhoods and even on social networks, where verbal abuse and hostility are widespread and uninhibited by any ethical controls.

Solutions

1 - Reduce tensions by steering the debate to policy issues away from narrow politics. The political exploitation of the Syrian refugee issue will only lead to more tensions. Populist exploitation of the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon could win some parliamentary seats, but it would open up the country to civil and regional crises.

2 - Education first and foremost: The prevention of school dropouts for Syrian and Lebanese children (although the dropouts figure is lower for the Lebanese) fulfils various objectives, the most important of which is the provision of education for children and young people as their right in the hope that they would pursue a university or vocational education, and as a means of keeping them away from the dangers of early child labor and its effects on them and their communities.

3 - Launching and promoting joint economic projects between Syrian and Lebanese investors in the communities hosting the largest numbers of refugees would create jobs for all Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians, boost the local economy, and contribute to its prosperity through productive projects.

Anticipating the future by delving into and trying to understand the fault lines that have begun to emerge, targeting their manifestations through programs and projects with clearly set goals within the local geographical context of refugee host communities, keeping the issue away from the narrow Lebanese political game, and steering clear of populist discourse that blames everything that is negative on refugees, opens up the horizon for finding serious solutions to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon.

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Policies

Labour Policy and Practice

Lea Bou Khater*

Although Lebanon classifies as a middle income country, about one million Lebanese (28.5% of the population) continue to live in conditions of poverty and around 300,000 individuals (8% of the population) live in extreme poverty and are unable to meet their most basic food and non-food needs. The North and Mount Lebanon governorates account for around 65% of the total poor in Lebanon[1]. Today, Syrian refugees are concentrated in the poorest Lebanese regions, and the intersections between the geographic distribution of refugees and poverty pockets in Lebanon are noticeable, particularly in North Lebanon. One of the main factors behind the persistence of poverty and the lack of inclusive economic growth is the weak job creation and low quality jobs. More recently, the Syrian conflict and the large influx of refugees impacted both poverty and jobs[2]. In the context of the protracted Syrian refugee crisis, this article aims to unravel labour policy and practice pertaining to Syrian refugees in Lebanon since the outbreak of the crisis in 2011. The following sections briefly chart the current state of the labour market, as well as labour legislation and policies that regulate the work of Syrian refugees, tension related to labour issues between refugees and host communities, and finally initiatives that aim at installing better labour conditions.

Labour market information

Lebanon is marred with a low and stagnant activity rate of 49% which reflects a low female activity rate of around 26% in 2009. Almost half of Lebanese workers (46%) work in services, followed by around a third (27%) who work in trade (2009)[3]. Labour demand is marked by the predominance of micro and small enterprises. In fact, around 90% of establishments have less than five employees while less than 0.5% of enterprises employ more than 50 employees[4]. According to the World Bank employment survey, 40% of the workforce in Lebanon is informal (2010)[5]. Unemployment is high among the young age categories, which can be explained by the mismatch between labour supply and demand[6].

Syrians have been coming to work in Lebanon since the sixties when the economic surge led to high recruitment of Syrian workers. In 1972, male Syrian nationals represented 90% of total construction workers in Lebanon[7]. During the civil war (1975-1990), Lebanese migration resulted in labour shortages. After the war, the debut of reconstruction resulted in massive recruitment of low-skilled male Syrian workers who mostly worked in construction and agriculture. The number of Syrian workers in the nineties was estimated to be between 400,000[8] and 1.4 million[9]. According to the ILO, an estimated number of 300,000 Syrian workers were located in Lebanon before the outbreak of the Syrian crisis[10].

According to the 2016 Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees (VASYR), 36% of working-age adults worked in the month before the survey. This percentage is lower in Akkar (28%), Zahle (29%) and Baalback (32%). Conversely, Bint Jbeil (47%), Batroun (46%), and Bcharre (44%) registered higher rates. Syrian labour force is mainly concentrated in the construction sector (33%), agricultural activities (22%), services (26%), retail/shops (6%) and cleaning (6%). Underemployment is predominant as Syrian workers are on average employed for 14 out of 30 days[11].

Men are struggling to find economic opportunities that enable them to earn a regular income in Lebanon and are facing acute physical insecurity and a high level of discrimination. Other family members, such as women but also children, have had to make up for the lack of family income. Adding to their care-taking roles and to fulfilling household chores, many Syrian women have had to work to financially provide for their families. Women have been able to get more jobs in the informal sector, such as petty trading, seasonal agricultural work and cleaning[12]. Child labour among Syrian refugees in Lebanon is also critical. And because of the prevalent gender norms, more boys are working than girls, including in services such as electrical, motor and barbershops, restaurants, supermarkets as well as in construction and agriculture[13]. In contrast to boys, girls mostly work in the domestic and agricultural sectors[14]. Ultimately, both girls and boys are vulnerable to mistreatment, harassment and violence.

Labour legislation and policies

Prior to the Syrian refugee crisis, the conditions of Syrian workers in Lebanon were governed by a set of bilateral agreements in respect with the Lebanese labour law. According to the Lebanese labour code, foreign workers required a work permit within ten days of entry, which should give them access to social security, the right to a minimum wage and security protections. In practice, the majority of 'foreigners' work illegally.

Following the outbreak of the Syrian conflict and the surge in the number of Syrian refugees, the legislative and policy environment pertaining to labour issues changed. Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, the government of Lebanon relied on ad hoc policies. In February 2013, the Minister of Labour issued a circular allowing Syrian workers access to a number of occupations that were previously restricted to Lebanese nationals, including construction, electricity, and sales. Syrians already practiced these activities prior to the decision however without permits[15]. Recently, the Lebanese government issued a decision depriving the Syrian refugees of the right to work. Moreover, the government considers that the «displaced» lose their humanitarian refugee status the moment they start working, as they already benefit from UNHCR assistance. Nevertheless Syrian refugees continue to seek work in view of providing for their families. Unfortunately, the violation of the government decision exacerbated the vulnerability of Syrian refugees in the Lebanese labour market: employers tend to recruit Syrians for short-term jobs or depriving the Syrian worker from remuneration as they are unable to resort to the judiciary or the police to ask for their rights. Employers tend to confiscate all personal documents of Syrian workers including the ID card, passport and residency papers.

Another consequence of these labour restrictions is that Syrian refugees work without any legal protection or social security. In case injured on the workplace, Syrian workers are unable to sue their employers to demand compensation[16].

Conflict and tension related to labour issues

Despite tension between host communities and Syrian refugees related to social and economic issues, no violent incidents were reported except for scanty cases. The conflict map managed by Lebanon Support shows an increase of 31% in the number of conflict incidents[17] between 2015 and 2016: 3502 incidents were recorded in 2015 as opposed to 4605 in 2016. However, conflicts of «social discrimination» and «socio-economic development» are the two least frequented categories with respectively 169 and 98 mapped incidents in 2016. Some Lebanese civilians have been recently protesting against Syrian unfair labour competition and unemployment (15 incidents in 2017)[18]. According to the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), few dangerous incidents took place in 2015 such as the 2014 incidents of Arsal and Tripoli, which have sternly affected stability in the relations between host communities and Syrian Refugees. However, according to the main perception surveys, tension remains high, along with a risk of violence propensity and confrontation between Syrian refugees and their Lebanese hosts[19].

Programs and initiatives

Two years after the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis, the government of Lebanon has underlined job creation as a key priority for the stabilization from the Syrian conflicts on households, enterprises and communities[20].

In fact, the sector, in 2016 LCRP Livelihood Response, adopts an indirect approach towards access to income and employment. Instead of directly implementing income-generating activities, the livelihoods response entails investment in projects in the private sector and public institutions that in turn will lead to job creation. Taking into account the priorities and concerns of the government as stated in the Policy Paper, interventions will primarily target Lebanese vulnerable groups which will constitute the «entry point of all livelihoods interventions». Indirectly, these interventions will target Syrian and Palestinian refugees in compliance with the legal provisions that currently allow Syrians to work in agriculture, construction and cleaning. The most recent intervention is the job creation in labour intensive sectors mainly through the Subsidized Temporary Employment Programme (STEP). STEP is a three-year programme that aims to support several hundred SMEs through matching grants, business development services, and wage subsidies. This scheme provides financial incentives for enterprises to create new job opportunities for both Lebanese and Syrian nationals.

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(13) UNHCR. 2016. «Children at Work: A Bigger Issue for Boys». [Online] Available at: http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/children-at-work.html

(14) *Ibid*.

(15) Akram Susan et al.. 2014. *Protecting Syrian Refugees: Laws, Policies, and Global Responsibility Sharing*. Boston: Boston University School of Law.

(16) *Ibid*.

(17) The Conflict Analysis Project defines conflict as follows: «Going beyond the view of conflict through a security framework associated with belligerency and violence, Lebanon Support upholds that conflict is of a socio-political nature. It thus sheds light on dynamics underlying a broad spectrum of violent and non-violent contentions including social movements, conflicts opposing minorities (ethnic, religious or sexual among others) as well as local, national or regional actors' policies». Available online: http://civilsociety-centre.org/article/conflict-analysis-bulletin-issue-6-march-2017?language=en

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Stories

The following pages embrace three real scenes as told by Syrian workers, both males and females, in recounting their daily suffering in the country of asylum at the social and legal levels, as well as their relationship with the Lebanese host community.

Safia Flees ISIS Brutality and Looks to UN for Help

Sobhiya Najjar*

© Artwork by visual artist Ahmad Ghaddar

Safia's hazel eyes are sad. They hide stories of fear, oppression and injustice; stories that are similar to the ones in Greek novels or Indian movies. This young woman whose husband was left paralyzed after a car accident, did not surrender to fate. But what if fate surrendered to war and to the armed fighters of ISIS who «have no respect to sanctity, women or children, not even to themselves», as the 29-year-old Safia puts it.

Safia and her husband paid all their savings to escape from the ISIS bullets and the «burning, scorching, devilish, and horrible injustice» of their militias. Safia recalls this and shakes every time she remembers those black days she witnessed before running away with her sick husband and her two-year-old son. «We survived a journey of death. We saw death with our own eyes... We stayed for three consecutive nights in the forests from Deir ez-Zor to the Lebanese borders. I was carrying my son on my back, as well as his milk, water and food supplies so that he doesn't die of hunger. We tied a deal with the smugglers through a dealer we knew to cross all those long distances full of mines, explosions and terror... I felt as if in the middle of a movie or a nightmare». Every time Safia talks about these days, she sweats and shivers then hugs her son who just is three years old now. «I want him to have a good future, but we do not always get what we wish for. We escaped death, but poverty is not letting go. I work in the field of agriculture here in Rmeish, where my husband used to work 15 years ago, before he had an injury and had metal implants in his leg. He knew a family here who owned an agricultural land, so he communicated with them and they helped us regain our life, or rather be born again». Safia is working in tobacco cultivation around six hours a day and her husband helps her whenever he can to pay for the house expenses and the rent. Safia, pregnant with a new child, in her sixth month, says: «I prick tobacco and get paid one thousand Lebanese Pounds per thread. It is a small amount for the effort, but we have no other job. The rent of our house, which is composed of one room, a kitchen and a bathroom amounts to 150 dollars. Sometimes, we make less than the money needed for the rent, so we borrow from the grocer what we need for food. We even sleep without dinner sometimes». Safia hopes the United Nations will help them through a temporary solution, «at least to eat and drink», as she puts it. However, the appointment she made with the United Nations Refugee Office was postponed twice... Safia is currently expecting, she has a child she did not enroll in school yet and does not know how, yet she is full of «hope in the United Nations», as she asserts.

Abu Yussef Builds Houses for People but Cannot Build a Future for Himself

© Artwork by visual artist Ahmad Ghaddar

A pair of worn-out jeans, a shabby cotton shirt and a hat that has witnessed sunrise and sunshine for more than a year and a half. Smoke coming off his cigarette like bits of the accumulated worries that pile up on his face, Abu Yussef, a father of three (two girls and a boy). The forty-year-old man who ran away from Deir ez-Zor with his wife and two daughters (before his almost eight-month old son was born) keenly mixes concrete with his shovel. He is a true master who understands his trade which he had inherited from his forefathers.

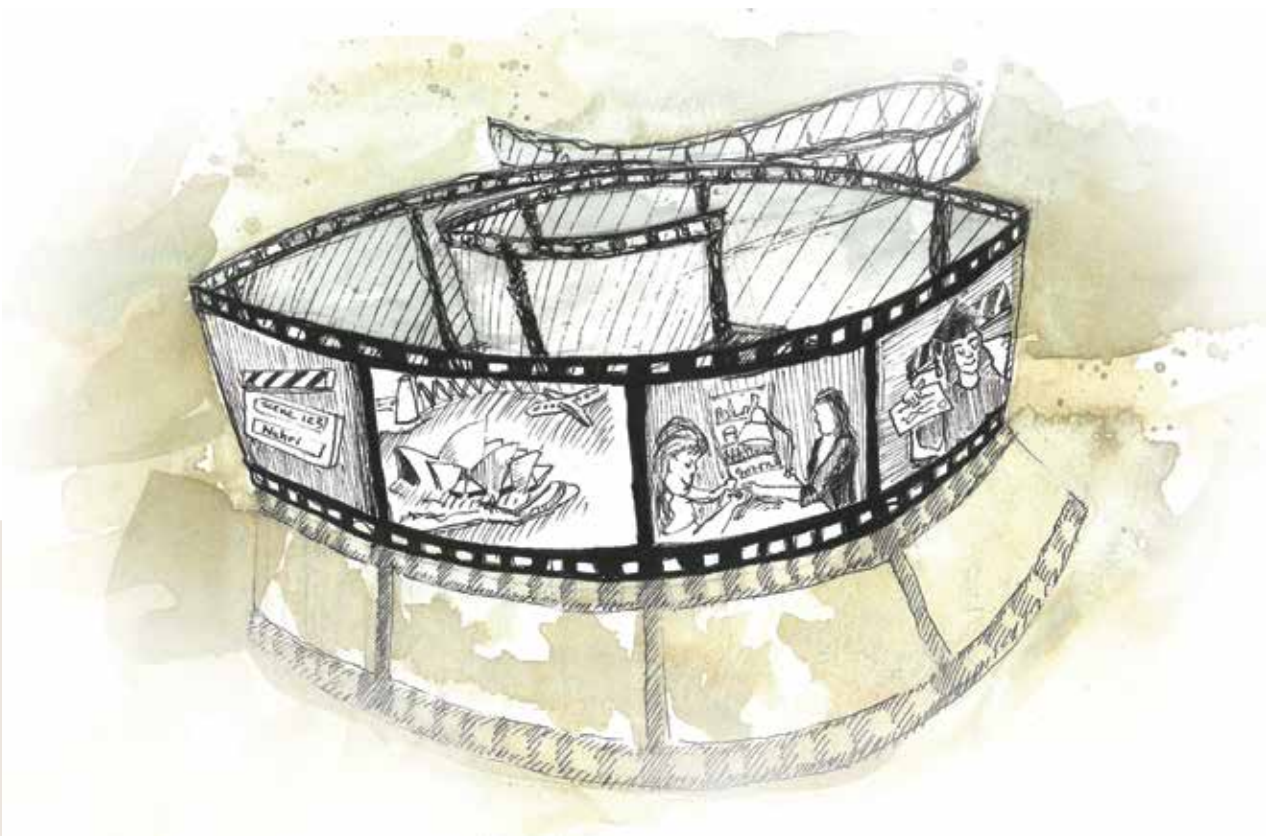
The sweat pearls gather on his forehead, then drop to his nose and mouth where he licks them as though it were flowing water, and says: «A small water bottle costs 500 Lebanese Pounds. I get paid between four and five thousand pounds an hour, which means that I am more entitled to the sweat coming out from my body than are the land and soil»... Abu Yussef's reputation among the residents of Rmeish (a village in the Bint Jbeil district) where he lives in the south of Lebanon, is unshakable. People in the neighboring villages trust his work because he is «honest, poor and wants just to earn a living», as someone describes him. But «reputation is not a bread winner around here and does not grant us the right to work in the country of refuge», as Abu Yussef ascertains. He adds: «Back in Syria, the palm of my hand destroyed mountains and built castles and buildings. These muscles have built most of the houses in Deir ez-Zor. Physically, it had made me very tired, but I had a clear conscience and did not worry about issues such as nationality or residence or security...».

When Abu Yussef talks, the bitterness in between his words can almost injure his tongue: «As if running away from murder, slaughter, wars and ISIS was not enough, we suffer to get a job by the sweat of our brow. We do not want to take someone else's riches. We just want to live in peace and honesty. If war in Syria ▶

ends today, I would go back empty-handed. I would only take these clothes, mixed with concrete. Believe me, no one likes to be a foreigner or to feel humiliated...».
Abu Yussef prefers living in Syria, but not before «...security settles in. We saw death with our own eyes. We will not risk our lives and that of our children once again, even if, as the saying goes, «*we are living here for the lack of death*». Abu Yussef gets paid around 150 dollars a month, a wage that does not allow him to even buy milk for his son, or bread for his girls and wife. He asks himself: «Would any Lebanese accept to live with 150 dollars a month?». Abu Yussef's breastfeeding wife helps him with the house's expenses by providing cleaning services in some houses, but she says «Not everyone accepts that I work in their houses. There are many racist people who dislike Syrians, but at the same time there are very good people who help us feed our children. I pray to God to give me breast-milk until my son is old enough to be enrolled in school. My milk is free, it is a gift from God. Powder milk is more expensive than gold in Lebanon».
Abu Yussef has no problems with the village residents. His problem lies with the Lebanese Government who wants him to pay for the residence permit while he does not get paid for food. He asks that the humanitarian organizations study the cases of thousands like him. He adds: «It is true that people look down on Syrians in most of the regions, but God sends us good people to help us. These aids however do not build a family and do not provide financial stability, but instead keep us feeling inferior and humiliated every day. We do not want anybody's pity. We want our salaries to increase in order to be able to eat, drink and live in a room with a kitchen and a bathroom, without having to be grateful to anyone»...
His second problem is his fear for his two daughters who are not enrolled in school yet. «They told us there is no place for Syrian students in the public school. There are not enough seats for the number that increased with the displacement of many Syrians to the region. This really scares me. I do not want my children to be illiterate. Ignorance breeds ignorance and poverty, and these two elements breed violence and wars»...

Nahreen, Shoved by Drama from Al-Hasakah to Beirut... Now Awaits Salvation in Sidney

All day long, Nahreen is in another world. She works silently and professionally. She trims the nails of elegant ladies and calmly cleans dead skin off of the sides. She then massages the hands and feet with hydrating creams before returning to the nails to paint them with bright colors that are full of hope, just like her laughter.
Nahreen works in Downtown Beirut. She is this brunette girl who escaped to Lebanon with her aunt and brother since the escalation of the battles in Al-Hasakah region, where she was born and raised and where she obtained her degree in theater from the Faculty of Fine Arts.
The tough-as-a-rock 28-year-old woman says: «After graduating, I dreamt of becoming a drama actress. I started teaching children in schools, but hoped to get a nice role in a good series. While waiting for the acting role, life shoved me into one the most terrorizing drama roles of my life». Nahreen faces the waves of the sea and the lethal winds of war that displaced her from her country despite her will. «They kidnapped my brother when he was twenty years old. We have no idea who did it, and we still know nothing about him. They threatened to kill us all, all of our big family. Islamic Groups were threatening all the Christians. They said they will burn our houses, rape our women and slaughter our men... We all escaped before the break of dawn...We left everything behind. We only brought some gold and money that our parents have collected over the years».
Nahreen does not sigh and she does not cry. She speaks with defeat. However, she does not take advantage of her refugee status in Lebanon and does not allow for anyone to have pity on her. She works by the sweat of her brow. «Aesthetics and beauty were never my profession. When I arrived to Beirut, I was scared. I stayed with my father, aunt and brother in the house provided to us by one of our Syrian acquaintances who has been working here for the last twenty years. We were afraid the armed people will find out our place; fear turned us into prisoners... But we soon adapted and rented a house in Sabtiyeh. And since tending to beauty care is important in Lebanon, there is no better field to work in. This is how I started working in a nail salon that our neighbor had introduced me to».
Nahreen did not bring her college diploma with her. She was anxious when she ran away and work and education were not on her mind. All she was concerned about was fleeing rape and slaughter by the Islamic Groups. «I have no command of foreign languages. I get by with English, but what school in Lebanon would welcome me to teach theater like I was doing in Syria? Especially in light of where I am living, where everyone speaks French, which I do not understand at all». She adds: «This is not my dream job and it does not fit my ambitions, but I am forced to work because the money we brought with us had evaporated within days. My aunt is old and my dad had travelled later on to Germany with his second wife, the one he married after my mother had died. My stepmother had a family there so she helped him leave with her. My brother, my aunt and I stayed here awaiting our fate».
Nahreen did not want to live in Lebanon for the rest of her life, even though she adapted with the people, made friends and had a job that earns her around 600 dollars a month. «Honestly, I got used to life in Beirut and I plan things here with my friends and neighbors where we go to the mountains and lovely regions every Sunday. I even have a boyfriend who takes care of me and helps me financially. But life in Lebanon is hard and everything is expensive. I do not want to spend my days cleaning the nails of bourgeois women, so I decided to travel».
The elegant and courteous Nahreen, who is tactful in addressing her clients and colleagues applied to the German Embassy. For two years, she waited with no answer. She wanted to immigrate to Germany, but someone recommended the immigration to Australia, where visas are granted faster. This fearless girl did not wait long; she went to the Australian Embassy and applied for immigration. After a long wait, she got an affirmative call. «I exploded with joy. I felt life was smiling at me again. I do not care what I will do there, what I will eat... All I care for is to be treated like a human being entitled to respect and dignity. A human being who is entitled to eat and to drink and to be hospitalized, no matter their religion or ethnicity or nationality», Nahreen affirms, with tremendous happiness. She will travel to Sidney soon, hoping to make her way into acting instead of the nightmare-like drama she's been living for 5 years.



** News reporter, journalist and researcher*

Economy

The Economic Benefits of the Massive Presence of Syrian Refugees

Bachir el Khoury*

Off the beaten track and away from the analyses often made about Syrian refugees and the negative impact of their presence on the country's economy, one thing is certain, though it gets little media coverage: this presence has benefits too, and considerable ones at that.

The presence of nearly 1.5 million refugees in a country of 4 million is without a doubt a burden for the society as well as the economy, but analyses, media coverage and political speeches often given on the topic in Lebanon paint a very bleak picture, and unfairly impute – to electoral ends and out of xenophobia – all the problems that the country is facing exclusively to the Syrian refugees.
The negative aspects are often highlighted, yet in economic terms, for example, this presence is more nuanced than what is portrayed. In net terms, the result may even be said to be «positive», although a qualitative study is yet to be produced to this effect.

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Job Market: A Boon for Companies

One of the main benefits – albeit one that is often overshadowed – of the presence of several hundred thousand Syrian workers is the large supply of cheap labor that has allowed a large number of Lebanese companies to reduce their payroll costs and their overall costs in a particularly difficult context – which has more to do with external factors than with the massive presence of refugees – and to survive thus the successive crises that the country has witnessed since 2011, in addition to boosting the competitiveness of certain companies.
According to ILO, 88% of refugees is paid 40% less than the minimum wage in Lebanon (the equivalent of roughly USD 280/month)[1] while children, some as young as six, are paid USD 4 a day[2] in some areas in North Lebanon.
In addition to the multiple abuses carried out in this area, these employees do not have any medical coverage or work insurance, the fact which leads to more savings for the employers – Syrian workers are often present in markets where local labor supply is already very low (construction, agriculture, home services, supermarkets, etc.). These workers are rather competing with other foreign unskilled workers and not with the Lebanese, which also pushes down the wages in these market segments. This too benefits the Lebanese employer with regard to production costs. The educational level of the refugee population is actually structurally incompatible with any competitive setup in the sectors coveted by the majority of the Lebanese, in addition to the legal restrictions that make access to these sectors very limited.
In fact, more than half of the refugees are under the age of 24, a third of whom are illiterate, 40% have completed primary school and 3% have attended university[3]. In addition, 92% of the active population[4] work illicitly. The Lebanese, on the other hand, had an enrollment rate in primary education of 106.6% and 86.3% for secondary education, and more than 46% attended university[5] in 2012. This structural gap is even less conducive to real competition in the job market given that more than 83% of the Lebanese (formally) active population works in the private sector[6].

Local Consumption: USD 1.5 Billion Per Year

In addition to the job market, Syrian refugees consume locally at an average of USD 106 per capita (2016 figures), which represents, based on the official number of refugees registered with the UN, roughly USD 1.5 billion per year. This has boosted private consumption, which is one of the main components of the GDP, and thus contributed to economic growth, even if it has been modest in recent years. The rental market alone has a turnover of almost USD 50 million[7], not to mention the rent paid to tent owners in informal camps, varying on average between USD 100 and 160 per household. The purchase of basic consumer goods in the local market by more than one million refugees has also boosted revenues from consumption taxes. State revenues thus grew by roughly USD 600 million between 2011 and 2016[8], a substantial portion of which came from indirect taxation of goods and services. Refugees also beef up the Treasury through the telecommunications sector, mainly through mobile telephony, the number of subscribers having increased by about 400,000, to reach 4.3 million between 2013 and 2016. Another source of public revenues is the cost of residence permits that have been imposed since the beginning of 2015 for a fee of USD 200 per year for each Syrian citizen aged 15 and above. If only 20% of the people concerned[9] renew their documents now, this would allow the State, largely thanks to refugees, to increase its revenues from residence fees (all categories of foreigners combined) from USD 35 million to 50 million between 2011 and 2015[10].

Foreign Aid and Investments

Lebanon also receives roughly USD 1.5 billion[11] in humanitarian aid each year from various regional and international organizations to provide relief to refugees while several aid conferences for countries neighboring Syria have been held since 2011, in Kuwait, London, and Geneva. During the last international summit in April, Lebanon demanded a USD 10 billion package to be spread over 7 years – its disbursement, however, is still under consideration by the potential donors.
Finally, part of the bourgeoisie from Damascus and Aleppo settled in Beirut at the beginning of the crisis, while money transfers to the Lebanese banking system have taken place and contributed to a certain extent, however small, to the growth of the deposit base. Although many wealthy Syrian businessmen have opted to leave Beirut and settle in the Gulf or in certain countries of the Maghreb, or even Europe and the United States, a minority still exists and spends in Lebanon: renting housing, even buying luxury apartments and cars, schooling their children in private schools, investing in SMEs and startups, etc.

Structural Failings and State Incompetence

While there are other economic benefits to the massive presence of refugees, it is quite sensible and valid to recall that beyond all the arguments made above, some of which are backed by figures, the problem of unemployment in Lebanon and all the infrastructure shortcomings that the local population – and indeed the refugee population – suffers from existed well before the onset of the Syrian crisis as a result of State incompetence. Although it is now at 20%[12], according to IMF estimates, this deterioration is linked more to the general local and regional conjuncture – which has caused growth to drop to 1% on average over the past 3 years, compared to more than 9% between 2007 and 2010 – than to the presence of the refugees. There is no denying of the fallouts relating to it. But what is dangerous and vicious is that this presence has now become a propaganda tool – sometimes overexploited to iniquitous ends, turning away from honest and constructive scientific discourse – and a pretext to mask the State's chronic incompetence. This same line of reasoning was used at the time of the Syrian tutelage. And yet we have been waiting to see any progress since 2005.

* Journalist

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The Peace Building in Lebanon news supplement

Issue nº 16, August 2017

Sociology

Understanding Racism Intersectionally: Right-wing Politics and Its Social Repercussions in Lebanon

Rima Majed*

The world today looks grim. The past year has witnessed alarming political developments in the West, signaling the rise of the far right and threatening a breakdown in the liberal value system that was preaching freedom, diversity, multiculturalism and inclusion. The Brexit vote in the UK and the consequent rise in hate crimes against migrants; the coming to power of Donald Trump in the US despite his clearly racist, sexist and misogynist politics; and the rise of regressive, counter-revolutionary movements in the Arab world are indicators of the «dark» times we are going through. The progressive achievements of past revolutions and civil rights movements seem to be at risk with this recent wave of unleashed hatred, racism and xenophobia.

What is this relapse about? Are we witnessing conditions similar to those of Europe at the turn of the 20th century leading to the rise of Fascism and Nazism? How do we understand this rise of the far right and what are its social repercussions on societies around the world?

Today, globalization and liberal values are in crisis. The idea of the world being a «small village» where the principles of freedom, diversity and inclusion are to be respected is in trouble. The rise of the far right and the spread of a racist and xenophobic discourse signal the vulnerability of the liberal system that preaches «reedoms without giving serious attention to structural inequalities. The fragility of this system that attempts to address social issues through the politics of «culture» and «identity» away from economic conditions becomes apparent with every major economic breakdown, which quickly destabilizes these liberal values of freedom, multiculturalism and inclusion, and allows for the rise of social and political conservatism. In fact, since the financial crash of 1929, each economic crisis has been accompanied by a rise in populist right-wing politics and a wave of heightened racism and xenophobia. This historical observation poses important challenges to post-structuralist and liberal ideologies. What does freedom and diversity mean in a capitalist world where inequalities are stark, exploitation is blatant and migration is necessary yet problematic (especially given colonial histories)? How can we sustain and respect freedoms and diversity in times of economic hardship where competition within the already gendered and racialized labor markets is more ferocious?

In times of crises, «political correctness» fades away and the real dynamics of power and social hierarchies appear more clearly, often taking the ugly shape of racism. Therefore, we cannot understand racism and xenophobia without looking at the broader socio-economic context and structural conditions that facilitate their rise in society. In fact, the repercussions of the financial crisis of 2008 are still unfolding at the social level. High rates of unemployment, economic insecurity, political unrest, ongoing wars, the refugee crisis that has reached Europe, and the global discourse of the «war on terror» have all created a fertile soil for racism, xenophobia and right-wing populism to flourish and to reach power in some Western countries. However, racism is not recent and its perceived rise in the West lately indicates a shift from it being latent and contained to becoming more outspoken and widespread through political campaigning and media coverage. Moreover, racism and populist right-wing politics have manifested themselves in different places around the world with varying intensities depending on their local contexts. In times of instability and unrest, populist slogans related to «security», «strong» leadership, «war on terror», «nationalism», and «border control» can become very appealing everywhere in the world. This is obvious in the Lebanese context.

The political landscape in Lebanon today is dominated by right-wing politics that vary on the sectarian spectrum between liberals and conservatives. Although the main political parties in Lebanon differ in their positions towards the Syrian or Palestinian causes, their right-wing politics clearly converge in their treatment of refugees and migrant workers. All major political parties in Lebanon are complicit in disseminating or allowing a racist culture to spread against migrant workers and refugees without clearly attempting to counter it. Therefore, it is important to highlight that racism and xenophobia are not innate characteristics of some societies or natural outcomes of cultural, racial or ethnic diversity. These are attitudes and behaviors that develop through an active process of «othering» that attempts to portray the «other» as a threat and that uses scapegoating as a strategy to evade responsibility and shift blame in society. Racism is often the result of a discourse that is actively spread by the ruling class and its media outlets in a way that shifts the blame away from the State onto the weaker categories, which are often the refugees and migrants. Therefore, most problems in the country, such as the lack of job opportunities, the electricity shortage, traffic congestion, the housing crisis, high crime rates, can easily be blamed on the refugees without questioning the role and responsibility of the State. Within such a context of heightened racism and populist politics, the State's crackdown on refugees becomes welcome and tolerated by some citizens, who come to perceive the refugees as a political, economic and security threat. It is in such conditions that the «national security» discourse becomes a priority and takes over all other pertinent social and economic causes.

The repercussions of the financial crisis of 2008 are still unfolding at the social level. High rates of unemployment, economic insecurity, political unrest, ongoing wars, the refugee crisis that has reached Europe, and the global discourse of the «war on terror» have all created a fertile soil for racism, xenophobia and rightwing populism to flourish and to reach power in some Western countries

Therefore, racism is a form of identity politics that discriminates against certain groups in society based on a hierarchy of «identities». Whereas «old racism» is focused on skin color and phenotypical features, «new racism» is more cultural than physical. It discriminates based on nationality, culture, religion, etc. Whereas old racism was linked to slavery and colonization, the rise of new racism is very much linked to globalization, migration and the rise of the nation-state and nationalist ideologies that played on the hardening of the boundaries of certain identity groups in opposition to the «others». Like most other types of identity politics, racism is often successful in masking material and structural conditions by focusing on stereotypes and scapegoating. It manages to pit the poor and the unfortunate against each other by playing the card of identity politics and nationalism. This is clear in Lebanon where, instead of holding the State accountable for the despicable living conditions, a racist discourse has spread blaming the refugees for «taking our jobs», «menacing our political stability», «changing our culture», and «threatening our ways of life». However, although the racist logic attempts to portray the refugees as one homogeneous group and describes a clear hierarchy of identities when it comes to social, political and economic rights, we should not fall in the trap of understanding racism one-dimensionally. A closer examination of the dynamics of racism in Lebanon suggest that racism can only be understood through intersectionality, since it is played out differently depending on the social class, occupation, gender and political position of the refugee. Syrians in Lebanon are not all perceived and treated equally today. The historical context of the Syrian-Lebanese political and social relations are crucial in understanding the dynamics of these relations today and the conditions providing the fertile ground for racism and discrimination. However, what seems to be most interesting in the analysis of the discourse of racism against Syrian refugees in Lebanon is the clear overlap between classism and racism. The curfews on Syrian refugees that were imposed by more than 45 municipalities in Lebanon perfectly illustrate this point. An examination of the phrasing used in most of the curfew banners reveals clear discrimination against «Syrian» or «foreign» workers specifically, and not against Syrian refugees in general. This is very telling about the dynamics of scapegoating that considers poor refugees workers to be the ones who pose a real threat, not the rich foreign investors or middle class «displaced» Syrians. Therefore, this is not simply plain xenophobic discourse against «foreigners» or refugees in general, but rather a specific one against the working-class refugees who are perceived as an economic burden and a security threat. Interestingly, although the term «refugee» is not used by the

© «Fear» printmaking artwork by Azza Abo Rebieh

Lebanese State given the legal implications of recognizing the Syrians in Lebanon as refugees, the media and public discourses have started using the word «refugee» to refer to the poor Syrians in camps, while using other words such as «visitor», «investor» or «displaced» to refer to the middle or upper-class Syrians in Lebanon. Such a simple analysis of the framing used in curfew banners shows the intersectionality of racism and the centrality of class position in understanding identity-based discrimination such as racism.

Finally, despite the pessimist analysis of the rise of right-wing populism and blatant racism, there is room for optimism today. A closer look at the political dynamics in the world, from the rise of new left-wing movements in Europe (and the unexpected popularity of Jeremy Corbin in the UK) to the political organization against sexism and racism in the US, anti-racism movements in Lebanon, and the renewed mobilization of poor and marginalized communities in the protest movement in the Rif of Morocco, are indicators that 'optimism of the will' is still alive!

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The Peace Building in Lebanon news supplement

Issue nº 16, August 2017

Psychology

The Effects of the Legal Situation on the State of Mind of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Hani El Rustum*

Khalil crossed the Syrian border in 2012 heading to Tripoli, Lebanon, to pursue his studies. He volunteered with several local initiatives to provide assistance to displaced Syrians. On the one hand, he wished to help them, and, on the other, to contribute to a humanitarian cause. However, his life in Lebanon soon turned into an unstable situation, fraught with many daily difficulties. He was arrested at checkpoints several times and was subjected to questioning in connection with his work and his residence permit, which was later revoked. Being continually subjected to arrests brought forth a sense of insecurity and instability, which in turn generated a state of intense fear and the desire to escape into the unknown.

A simple incident made Khalil's life hard and unbearable in Lebanon. It pushed him to travel to Sudan – since it is one of the few countries that does not require Syrians to obtain entry visas – and then to Iraq, Turkey, Sweden, through Greece and Germany, overcoming all the journey's dangers, exploitation, smugglers and human traffickers. «I was suffering terribly. Every time I would find work, I had to take a lot of verbal abuse, a lot of insults, rejection, and harassment. I did not have the minimum rights of a worker. I could not take a vacation even if I was sick. Not to mention my low wage that would change along with the employer's mood. My life in Lebanon can be summed up in one word: injustice.»

At a time when Syrian refugees are facing great psychological and social pressures, partly as a consequence of the wars and battles they lived through in Syria, and dealing with difficult economic conditions wherever they are staying in Lebanon, there are new stressors that have become a key factor for the emergence and aggravation of stress and its effects on the Syrian society in Lebanon, namely security pressures and legal changes relating to the residence permits and employment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Stability – whether psychological, functional or social – and a sense of security are two of the most important conditions for refugees to be able to adapt in a host country such as Lebanon. The lack of stability and security leads to a fault in the structure of refugee communities at various levels.

The implementation of the laws relating to obtaining residence and employment permits for Syrians has turned Lebanon into a place of forced residence, as Syrian refugees have no say in any decision or choice in their lives – which they were forced in the first place to lead in a foreign country – in addition to being subjected to restrictions on their movement and work. All these changes in the lives of Syrian refugees in Lebanon have many psychological repercussions on them as individuals and groups. Moreover, in view of these harsh laws, the number of non-registered refugees and those who are not on the radar of the security forces has increased, thus forming a more dangerous hotbed for crime and moral, behavioral and violent perversions in society.

These effects lead directly to increased tensions that may explode at any moment and result in a conflict with multiple causes. These effects include:

The continuous changes that Syrian refugees go through in Lebanon lead to a state of psychological instability, which results in many psychological symptoms, most notably anxiety, mainly as a result of the uncertainty of the future, fear of arrest, and fear of poverty. «I feel a lot of psychological pressure when I move around Tripoli,» says Omar, a young Syrian who has been living in Tripoli since 2012. «The energy I expend on fear and anxiety about being illegal could have been used to work for my future.»

Anxiety, which is considered a mental disorder with strong symptoms, can often develop into a psychological disorder

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that has many psychological and physical effects on people who suffer from it, such as loss of appetite, sleep disorders, difficulty carrying out everyday tasks and depression, which may lead in advanced cases to suicide.

Frustration and despair are considered to be psychological symptoms that are created and exacerbated by living under threat. This constant sense of threat and lack of security leads to an increase in the production of adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine, the three most important hormones produced by the sympathetic nervous system in the face of any risk as part of what is known as the fight-or-flight response. Thus, when the nervous system is activated, a person may have different reactions: either to flee the situation, which manifests as depression, isolation and withdrawal in any confrontation, or being more defensive, which can take the form of conflict or fight. In the case of Syrian refugees, this conflict can be either internal, i.e. among the Syrians themselves, or external, i.e. between the Syrians and the Lebanese host community.

In addition, the psychological effects resulting from the legal pressures in Lebanon on Syrian refugees cannot be dissociated from their psychological vulnerability and proclivity to engage in illegal actions or activities, especially when the State is unable to keep track of them because of their irregular situation. As a result of their traumatic experiences, Syrian refugees are more likely to transform into persons who are quick to integrate into environments that may be incompatible with their reality, out of a desire for self-fulfillment, especially with regard to increasing economic productivity and helping their families. Given the strict laws restricting the movements of Syrian refugees, renewing their residence permits and working legally in the country, coupled with an overwhelming desire for self-fulfillment and a growing sense of guilt towards family and society, young Syrians can do nothing but find alternatives that may be considered violent or outlawed to make some money. According to a study conducted by International Alert in 2016, most young Syrians feel that life in Lebanon has become a great burden on them, and that the only solution is to leave to a country where they can guarantee rights for them and their families and live in justice and dignity. They also said that Lebanon is not the country where anyone can live in dignity, because of the pressures put on them. This feeling of frustration and uselessness, and the inability to do something can deprive Syrian refugees in Lebanon of the meaning of life, the ability and flexibility to adapt to the new reality in which they find themselves. This creates a breeding ground for internal conflicts, whether personal or with others, and thus turn them into ticking human bombs at times of frustration and need.

In addition, the psychological pressures that Syrian refugees undergo in Lebanon as a result of the security issues and their consequences have contributed to a heightened sense of persecution within the Syrian society, and this leads directly to widening the social gap between the Syrian society and Lebanese society, with the Syrians regarding Lebanon as a persecuting society that does not relate to their human suffering. This feeling has many consequences on the form of relations and social ties between the two communities, and takes the form of a relationship of persecutor, victim and rescuer, where the victim, i.e. the Syrian society, is looking to be rescued from the persecutor, i.e. the Lebanese society, with the help of the rescuer who can take many forms, including escaping the country illegally – putting their lives in great danger, such drowning, or making them vulnerable to human trafficking. It can also take other forms such as closed societies within the Lebanese society that are governed by their own laws and not regulated by any official or legal entity, as was the fate of some Palestinian camps that are not under the jurisdiction of the Lebanese State. These are often communities where poverty, destitution and crime are rife, with a high rate of child labor and early marriages, which are, naturally, phenomena that threaten the stability and security of the Lebanese State at various levels, including the economic, political and social.

Last but not least, the Lebanese State must consider all these factors seriously and deal with them before they aggravate and turn into uncontrollable phenomena that may lead to internal conflicts between the Syrian and Lebanese communities. The consequences may be undesirable in the long term. Increasing pressure on a persecuted and refugee society may be the fuse for a human explosion and today we do not have the capabilities to deal with such a potential event.

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The Dialect of Arab TV Screens Is Hard... Lebanese Is Not Easy!

Kinan Fakhoury*

As soon as I filled my lungs with the air of Metn, Lebanese harmonization began to do its job. The middle vowels unwittingly veered into Es, as someone who wishes to reinforce his new life with good faith. It is a dialect we have often heard in the media and Lebanese artworks, and we have always loved to speak it one day to appear to be stars and artists. The dialect the Arabs have become familiar with through television may seem easy and need only be indulged in, so TV presenters and artists are emulated. However, the matter is evidently different when one is in the company of numerous authentic tongues. He immediately notes how words differ on the ground then come across and backs away for fear of being met with ridicule. He begins to be more diligent, and asks: How can a Lebanese use that word and other meanings he had never heard before, the Lebanese media and art refining and replacing them for everybody to understand, not to mention the difficulty of interspersing speech with foreign words – English or French – a practice unique to the Lebanese in the region, and updating the list of vocabulary all along, which makes it difficult for the foreigner, including the Syrians who have used pure Arabic throughout their lives, to keep up with these novelties.

On the other hand, it is easy for Syrians from the regions bordering Lebanon to pick up what remains of the dialect: modifying a few words, replacing with other words and adding a new melody for their dialect to be branded Lebanese, since the Lebanese language includes dialects and vernaculars that vary by region.

Despite familiarity with the Lebanese dialect, Syrians from border regions sometimes reinforce their characteristic Syrian accent, known as the shamiyya, in Lebanon. For example, my friend Johnny who was a traditional proponent in the struggle of speaking a tone other than his dialect. He once told me that meeting his boss at the company he worked for in Kaslik required several approvals. When they were facing each other, he did not use a single Lebanese word, but rather used shamiyya solely, preferring it to the Lebanese, despite the latter closeness to the dialect of his border hometown.

When I entered the office of one of the central market managers who I deal with in my work as a quality control researcher in Beirut, I presented myself and then set about explaining the nature of my work to him in an already confused dialect, with a measure of Lebanese adding to the jumble and confusion, and an abundance of English phrases I inevitably use to describe what I do.

My accent sounded strange to the ears of the manager, not to mention my name. They made him think I was Jordanian, believing that Kinan was a name given to boys in Jordan despite the impression of other Lebanese that the name is of Turkish origin.

Several studies in this field suggest that people who are very good at learning different languages and dialects are often more open to others, the fact which helps them establish new relationships. They are also more inclined to blend and integrate into new societies, as opposed to those who are not as good at foreign languages. One study emphasizes the ability of women, compared to men, to do that.

If we examine the experience of the Iraqis in Lebanon, who have been away from their country as a result of the war for more than fourteen years, we see a much lower rate of adaptation than that of the Syrians in five years.

In the northern suburbs of Beirut – in Sad el Baushrieh, Sabtieh, and Jdeideh – the Iraqi accents are more commonly heard than the Lebanese or Syrian, as groups of Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs and other Iraqis have naturally taken refuge in those areas that house the bishoprics of their faiths in Lebanon.

While we do not find any trace of the Lebanese dialect in their accents, we hear Iraqi Arabic, Assyrian and Chaldean, but no Iraqi-Lebanese combinations similar to that the Syrians created in such a short time. Some believe that this is due to the fact that they embraced thousands of years ago other non-Arab ethnic groups, which they have also brought with them to Lebanon, and huddled up in those areas.

Speaking the Lebanese dialect guarantees for the foreigner quite effective identification in jobs were the Lebanese are favored. Based on that, some find that the equal level of qualification of Syrians – who are the biggest foreign competitor – and Lebanese in the labor market often plays to the advantage of the Syrians, as the employer loses out on some specifications and standards, such as foreign language proficiency and work experience, in return for the lower salaries and longer working hours that the Syrians accept, to become in the end Syrians in a Lebanese mold, a model the Lebanese have gotten used to dealing with in recent years.

While the foreigners' proficiency in the Lebanese dialect is for the Lebanese a testimony of good taste and manners, especially with regard to Syrians, who often find other ways of integrating, except for language, being the closest foreigners to the Lebanese, others see in that a sign of the Syrians' desire to become Lebanese in the easiest way possible. Most likely, the Lebanese do not look at those seeking to speak their dialect with superiority, because it is the nature of nations and peoples to be happy to see outsiders embracing and borrowing their culture. While a part of those who have overcome the issue of national identity and sense of national belonging see that the dialect of others and its strangeness do not stand in the way of communicating and interacting naturally with them, regardless of their background.

Talking the Lebanese way may open doors to Syrians for adapting and integrating, which is a welcome process, but obviously it also closes other doors, such as ties to the original society from which they came. Get-togethers with peers are not going to be free of sarcastic comments about a Syrian's new linguistic style, with every Lebanese word he may use, and the consequent need to justify it to them, as he will often be seen, as an impostor, or denying his origin. I remember a Syrian friend whose Facebook page had comments in Lebanese from people from his town mocking his use of the Lebanese dialect. This caused him embarrassment before his fiancée, who also urged him not to indulge in this dialect, so as to avoid the numerous sarcastic comments from friends.

* Journalist

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Phenomenon

The Tragicomedy of Stray Bullets

Abdo Wazen*

I have a very personal story with stray bullets. I was six years old when I was hit by a stray bullet. The incident would have been fatal if not for divine intervention. During the night of July 19, 1963, on the eve of the feast day of Saint Elias – also known as the prophet Elijah – one of the popular saints with the Christians in Lebanon, my siblings and I were celebrating on the roof of our house, firing crackers and lighting candles. We soon got tired and went to sleep in a tent we used to set up every summer by the climbing grapevine.

That night, many Lebanese were also celebrating the speech given by President Fuad Chehab by firing volleys into the air to show their support. Within an hour, a stray bullet hit the tent's iron stake and ricocheted, hitting me in my left armpit, and it started to bleed. My father and mother gasped in fear upon discovering the stain of blood on my bed. My father quickly drove me in his car to a doctor's house who lived nearby. The doctor examined me thoroughly and looked at the wound. He was of the opinion that the bullet had grazed my armpit and had not penetrated inside. Initially he was confident of his conclusion as I was perfectly well, with a simple wound in my armpit. After cleaning and dressing the wound, the doctor asked my parents to take me home and watch for any signs of worsening, in the case of which to take me to the hospital promptly. He also directed them to take me to the hospital the next morning for an x-ray, so he could put his mind at ease about the bullet. The next morning, the x-ray revealed that the bullet had entered my armpit and gone into my rib cage, and was lodged in there. The doctor cried out to my mother, «A miracle has happened to your son, the bullet passed by the heart and arteries and didn't hurt him. There's a fine line between the bullet and his heart. A miracle.» I survived miraculously indeed and did not take a single pill, according to my mother.

Still the doctors would keep monitoring me for years for any signs of the bullet moving, with the bullet lodged in my chest to this day. At the time, my mother had to make a votive offering to Saint Elias, whose intercession with God saved my life. Since then, Saint Elias has been my patron saint, even in the years when I proclaimed my atheism, only to go back on that decision – but that's another story.

That stray bullet left me very afraid of bullets, whether stray or not. To this day, I cannot bear to hear the sound of gunfire, and I suffered greatly during our Lebanese wars because of this fear. Even today, I run for cover every time I hear gunfire. Maybe I am a coward. But my cowardice is quite legitimate.

The Lebanese are keen on firing off rounds. It is easy to speak of this unique Lebanese hobby. A strange hobby that has rarely been taken up by other peoples. They love to fire off rounds in the air on all occasions: weddings, births, funerals, passing school exams... Sometimes, the Lebanese do not even need an occasion for a round of fire. Even when some of their leaders give fiery speeches, they fire off in the air rejoicing at what they see as a victory. They are constantly in search of victories, even if illusory, to fire off a volley of shots. This is an infection that runs in their blood and veins, and that they have inherited from their parents and grandparents. Let us imagine citizens waiting for flocks of migratory birds to cross the sky of Lebanon to fire at them, yes, fire at them with military and not hunting rifles, even though they know that their flesh is not edible.

They are the «stray» Lebanese – that is how I have dubbed them and I call them that without any misgivings. They do not care about the innocent casualties who fall victim and are wounded as a result of this criminal gunfire, as if they are enemies and not their brothers sharing this country. And it is objectionable that they do not take heed and are not deterred, insisting on practicing their bloody hobby. They are keen on hearing the whizzing of bullets and seeing them leave trails in the night sky. I recall some Lebanese firing off what is known as tracer bullets, overjoyed and euphoric.

A few months ago, the Lebanese film director Philippe Aractingi launched a campaign on Facebook and other social media against indiscriminate gunfire in Lebanon after a stray bullet penetrated a window in his house, barely missing his son, who was miraculously spared. The renowned director, who had delved into the depths of the Lebanese war in a major film, Under the Bombs, shared a picture of the glass that the bullet had penetrated and the damage it caused in the room. He also wrote a text condemning the «criminal» and calling for fighting this barbaric phenomenon that still prevails in Lebanon. Just a day after the start of this campaign, which was welcomed by social media users, a young Lebanese woman named Amal Khashfa fell victim to a stray bullet that hit her on the balcony of her house in Tarik el Jdideh, Beirut, and knocked her down... Before that, a young woman named Sarah Suleiman died after being hit by a stray bullet. The next day, Sarah's parents shared her moving will in which she asks for her organs to be donated.

Once, more than five citizens were injured by stray bullets in 24 hours in different regions. It is difficult to keep track of the names of all the victims of indiscriminate gunfire in Lebanon who die on the balconies of their homes, on sidewalks, in squares and in schools. Even the General Security does not have complete figures about the victims, whose number keeps growing by the day. Despite the calls for restraint, and all the threats and campaigns conducted by the Lebanese security forces, fans of firing into the air relentlessly persist in practicing this criminal act.

It is not surprising that this criminal phenomenon would be rampant in all Lebanese regions, as fans of firing off into the air come from all religious groups and walks of life, and they all come together in this tradition, considered to be a popular «noble» custom that dates back to the pre-civil-war era. According to them, gunfire should accompany all occasions, whatever their nature, in sadness and in happiness, and for political «struggles». No wedding or funeral is complete without a volley of shots, and only bullets provide the required aura of pomp, pride and solemnity. Some of those practitioners do not miss an occasion to fire off, and they go on the streets on New Year's Eve with their firearms and open fire in celebration. Once, a woman was shown on a television channel holding a rifle saying, there's no joy in New Year's Eve without a volley of shots, «It sounds nice.»

What is strange is that the bodyguards of some political leaders do not hesitate to fire their firearms in celebration, especially when their leaders give impassioned and patriotic speeches. Some citizens have tried to replace this custom with firecrackers and fireworks, something that is familiar to all Lebanese and is used for holidays and occasions, as an alternative to firearms. What matters is the peal of rifles and the echo of firecrackers in the air.

On November 30, 1949, the writer Fuad Suleiman wrote a heated article on the front page of Annahar daily, berating those who fire indiscriminately into the air, and accusing them of debasing bullets, the makers of history's most important revolutions and the liberators of nations and peoples. He wrote, «Bullets, how ignoble you are in Lebanon. How contemptible your song. How contemptible you are, the bullets of my country. In my country, the heroism of bullets is debased.» This bad and deadly custom is not new, and was not introduced by the civil war and the war that followed. It is a deeply rooted custom in Lebanon, with stories told of how grandparents would say of shots fired indiscriminately into the air, «what a sweet voice».

Firing into the air is a strange phenomenon indeed. What satisfaction do those «stray» people gain from bullets whizzing? What pleasure do these «criminals» take from indiscriminately killing innocent people? The Lebanese fire shots into the air not to rejoice, but rather to let the others – whoever those others are –know they are here, they have arms, they are ready. This tradition has been passed down by generations that have lived through the different eras of civil conflicts and has been entrenched by the war, which will not come to a true end as long as questions relating to it have not received healing answers.

I have always believed that there will be no lasting civil peace until all the Lebanese have given up their indiscriminate shooting hobby and their personal firearms. It is the job of the State to convince them of that and prove to them that the State is the authority and the protector.

* Writer and journalist

Rent

On the Repercussions of Rent Policies on the City and Everyday Life

Prepared by Public Works Studio
(Nadine Bekdache, Monica Basbous and Abir Saksouk)

Background

The housing landscape is often described in terms of (1) unaffordability, in a context of skyrocketing land prices and escalating rents as compared to minimum wages and overall household expenditures, (2) mismatch between supply and demand, (3) vulnerability to urban renewal displacement pressures, and (4) growing socio-economic inequalities, segregation and spatial fragmentation.

Under these circumstances, old lease contracts provide housing for more than 500,000 persons in major Lebanese cities. Beirut includes the largest share, about a quarter of a million persons, followed by Tripoli. On the other hand, since the inflation of the Lebanese pound during the civil war and as rents depreciated, the rent law turned into a controversy between the old landlords and the tenants. The matter has been exacerbated by the post-war policies that have made the private sector the main player in the provision of housing and imposed an economic system based on real-estate investment without any form of regulation.

With the restructuring of the State in the 1990s, old lease contracts – structured according to a rent control regime and defined as the main mode of accessing and sustaining housing in the pre-war era – turned into a «problem» that subsequent draft laws failed to resolve it. As such, in 1992, the system of rent control was terminated for new leases, and by that the state violated a social contract based on housing rights that had lasted for more than five decades; without addressing the old-leases problematic. Since then, the old tenants' issue was directly linked to a wider cause of affordable and adequate housing, and the need to develop a socially motivated housing policy was considered to be the roadmap to reach a just solution to the old rent dilemma.

Conversely, the old-leases problematic took on a different dimension with soaring property prices accompanied by the possibility of making huge profits if tenants were to be evicted for the purpose of real estate investment. Old tenants were evicted in return for a financial compensation in the value of 40% of the property valuation. In this equation, the monetary value of property had the upper hand over its social value, and the city's residents found a source for financing their needs, given the inadequacy of social security at all levels, including education, healthcare, retirement and housing.

In April 2014 - without any studies or surveys on the demographics of old tenants and old landlords, their social and economic backgrounds, and how they inhabit the city - a new rent law promoted as «the solution» to the old-leases problem, was passed under the slogan of doing justice to the impoverished old landlords. With the issuance of this law, the discourse centered around the dichotomy of tenants versus landlords, while obscuring the role of the public authorities at the core of this crisis. On the other hand, several studies, including those carried by the Legal Agenda, have shown that the parties benefiting from the new law are the owners of large capital. One of the studies shows that the details of the law includes very complex and expensive procedures, and can potentially stoke confrontations and conflicts between tenants and landlords. It concludes by saying that the law is a sign of «the power of the Parliament's commitment to give precedence to owners of large capital and their interests, even if this requires sacrificing the state's main function of promoting social harmony.»

The City's Future and Social Cohesion

Neighborhoods with old tenants are characterized by a diverse social fabric in terms of income, religion, denomination, place of birth and nationality, in addition to the close linkages between old residents and the cultural and urban history of the place. These old neighborhoods bear witness to what remains of the social and economic relations that were ruined during the civil war, as well as offer new housing opportunities to a diverse segment of the population. As such, they offer the possibility of an integrated and inclusive city. For, although Beirut shelters diverse groups of different nationalities and affiliations, nonetheless, demarcation lines between neighborhoods are recreated precisely in the process of buying properties, real estate development, and through the housing market. Moreover, the eviction of old tenants transforms neighborhoods into enclaves for the rich that are divided along sectarian lines. The city has become an opportunity for accumulation of wealth for the elite, and a reflection of the political wrangling between the parties contending for power. This spatial reconfiguration manifests as the the public authorities abandon their role in organizing housing according to an urban vision that preserves the historical urban environment and promotes social cohesion, while extracting social guarantees and threatening housing security. As a result, religious authorities' power over the population is strengthened, whilst their necessary geographic distribution is met; consequently, minimizing the role of citizenship in peacebuilding.

The recent rent law is tantamount to the judicial authorities' endorsement of protecting the interests of the owners of large capital and a tool to creating innovative and violent mechanisms to deprive the city's residents from the possibility of staying in houses and neighborhoods where they have long lived and earned their livelihoods. These laws are issued in tandem with dominant discourse that deliberately conflates notions, where the right to housing is reduced to the right to ownership, and ownership rights expand at the expense of other rights and public interest. By that, the law has also turned into a symbolic tool that deprives residents of their ability to resist eviction, play a role in creating the city's and their own future, and increases the vulnerability of their living conditions.

The impact of the law does not only involve society's most vulnerable (the elderly, disabled, non-nationals and the poor), but also, by expelling people from their neighborhoods, will also push up the number of vulnerable and marginalized. Beirut's residents are not at risk of eviction because of their legal status, but rather as a result of policies that undermine citizenship rights and consider them an obstacle to real estate development. This leads to unjust and undignified practices against city dwellers and forces them to undergo the ordeal of proving their «legitimacy» to remain in the city.

Narrating Beirut Through Its Tenants' Stories

In this context, Public Works Studio carried out Narrating Beirut Through its Tenants' Stories, a multi-disciplinary project (2015-2016) that studied the impacts of market-driven developments and policies on residential rights in Beirut and the creation of social and spatial injustices, resulting in the displacement of many low and middle-income families. To counteract these processes that are fragmenting lives and neighborhoods, the project aimed at studying, shaping, and implementing counter strategies to this ongoing process of displacement and shortage of affordable housing. As such, the research developed through a series of workshops on six neighborhoods in Beirut (Bashoura, Badawi, Tareek Jdeedeh, Mossaitbe, Roum, Chiah), where the investigation centered around the modes in which Beirut's residents access housing and vest claims over their homes and neighborhoods. The project also documented potential paths towards affordable housing, by mapping abandoned buildings, vacant apartments, rent-controlled units, evictions, landscape of housing arrangements and changes in land ownership.

The research was rooted within a vision of historicizing housing in relation to neighborhoods, while addressing the ▶

question of how do people - who are not covered by any property rights - inhabit the city?

Tenancy

One of the main findings of the survey conducted on buildings built prior to 1992 is that rent, both old and new, is the primary means of accessing housing. In some neighborhoods, the number of tenants exceeded the average for Beirut – 49.5% according to a UNDP study in 2008 – reaching 66% of residents in the Badawi district and 52% in the Roum district. The average number of old leases in the neighborhoods covered by the study is 23% – this figure is higher in older neighborhoods that still maintain a cohesive urban fabric.

In Moussaitbeh, for example, the buildings with old leases is below average and equivalent to the number of new buildings constructed after 1992. However, in Moussaitbeh's inner neighborhoods, like Hay el Lija to the east and the old backstreets of Furn el Bacha and Sufh, the majority of residents are old tenants and old landlords, most of whom share the same buildings.

Eviction and Investment

Despite a growing housing crisis, the study found a high number of vacant buildings in the mapped neighborhoods, ranging between 10% and 12% of the old urban fabric.

It also found that of the 381 buildings mapped in Tariq el Jdideh, 17 were vacant buildings as a result of eviction, 8 were vacated apartments and 19 buildings were threatened with eviction. One of these buildings has 28 apartments, with mostly elderly residents. In the Roum district and on Mar Mikhael Street, 11 building have been vacated and converted from residential use to restaurants and bars. It also found a block of 13 residential buildings in Moussaitbeh, around the Moussaitbeh mosque, that were vacated and damaged.

This is sample of the numbers found through the survey. However, when the mechanisms of eviction are explored in-depth, we find that the transfer of property ownership and the construction of mega projects that are at odds with the urban and social fabric of neighborhoods are the main drivers of evictions.

In the Roum district, for example, apartment prices increased today from USD 1,200 per square meter to USD 4,050, whereas 75% of Rmeil's residents are low-income tenants. Similarly, the price per square meter has risen in Tariq el Jdideh to USD 2,400 while most of the neighborhood's population are low-income residents. We also noted that these new projects are taking over public spaces and social landmarks, such as the demolition of the Olympia/Vendome film theater and other buildings categorized as heritage sites, and replacing them with a 19-storey building in Mar Mikhael, or the demolition of a building that was home for the elderly in Chiyah.

Stories from the Neighborhoods

Joumana and Leaving Tariq el Jdideh

Joumana and her family of seven have been suffering since they moved from the home where they were born and brought up in the Tariq el Jdideh area (Abu Shaker Square), to the town of Barja in Iqlim el Kharoub, south of Beirut.

The family was forced to leave its «historical» home and move to «an area they have no ties to but the new house they now live in» after the old building was sold to a real estate company that decided to demolish it and replace it with a newer construction. Joumana's family was not the only one affected by this situation, and it included all other old tenants residing in the building, since the compensation to evict was very modest and did not allow them to rent or buy a house within the city of Beirut.

The family had bought the house in Barja ten years ago, but kept offering it for sale several times out of reluctance. Realizing that they would not be able to live in Beirut anymore, the family obtained a bank loan to equip the house and make it habitable.

The remoteness from the environment in which they grew, the traditions that they knew, and the friends and neighbors with whom they lived gave rise to «a sense of alienation... an alienation that they were not able to come to terms with.» There was also the long daily commute to work to Beirut, traffic and transport expenses.

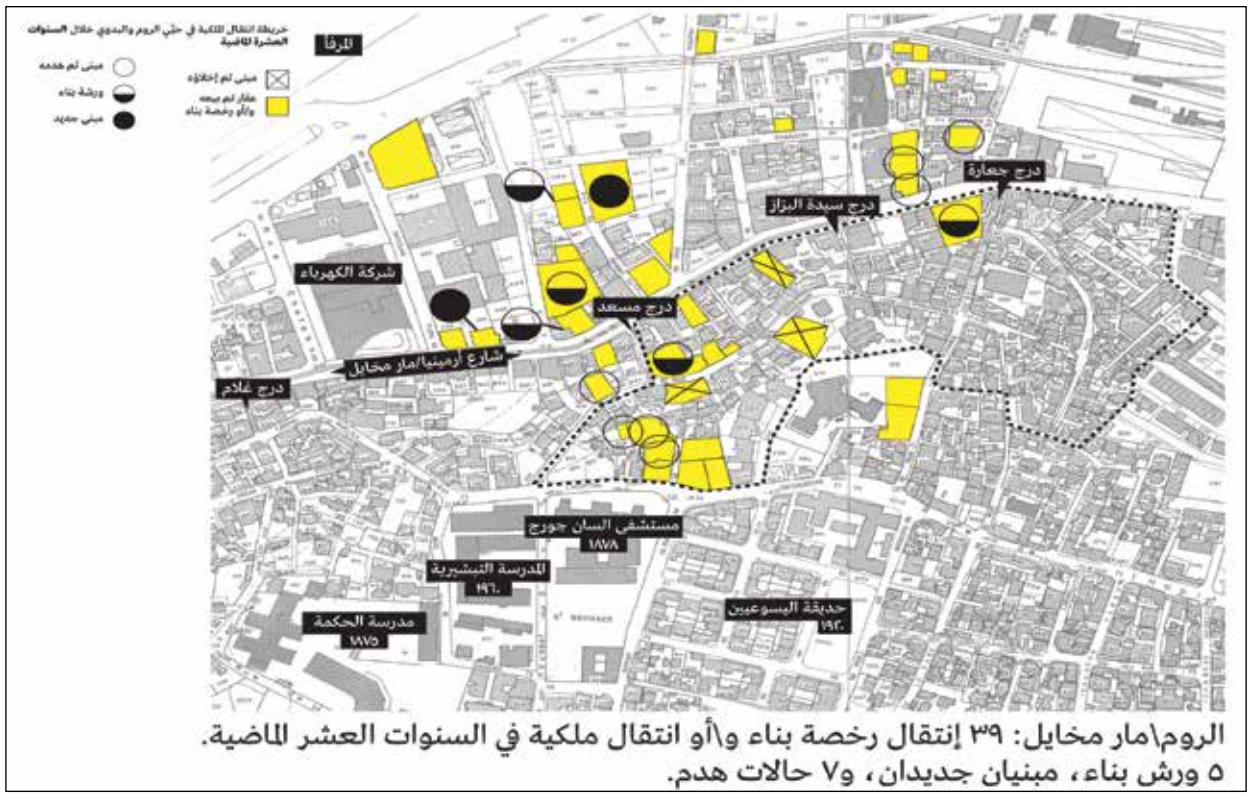
After a year living in Barja, Joumana decided to leave her family and return to Beirut. She rented a room in an apartment she shares with several other girls. The decision to share accommodation was difficult for her in the beginning, but it was the simplest and least expensive option, as rents are high and buying a property is beyond the bounds of possibility.

Joumana's entire family experienced this tension and confusion, and in particular her mother, who was lonely and found it difficult to engage with the new society after being separated from the place where she had spent 60 years of her life. Her health deteriorated and she was hospitalized several times.

«Unfortunately, all our neighbors are facing the same pressures and suffering, and they had to move to Jieh, Jadra and Sibline», says Joumana on the terrible situation her family and other families endure.

The Old Tenants Are the Weakest Link Confronting Mar Mikhael's Investors

Property number 641 on Mar Mikhael Street includes the houses of elderly Georgette, Umm Michel and her disabled husband, Madame Hayat, Mr. Nassif's family, Abu Wahid's family, and Mr. George. This property includes three small buildings that were inhabited by these six families, four of them were old tenants and two old landlords, in addition to Garo's shop on the main street Mar Mikhael. The original owner built the front part of the property in the 1930s, then in the 1950s he built the two rear parts. After his death, the property was passed down to his 11 heirs, only two of which reside on it, in its front part. In 2011, an investor, under the name of Michel-Ange Company, bought the shares of the non-residents, thus besieging the resident owners and forcing them to sell.



الروم\مار مخايل: ٣٩ إنتقال رخصة بناء و\أو انتقال ملكية في السنوات العشر الماضية.
٥ ورش بناء، مبنيان جديدان، و٧ حالات هدم.

Before 2006, Mar Mikhael was an industrial street on the outskirts of the city, where carpenters, shoemakers and craftsmen had lined the street since the 1920s. About 10 years ago, restaurants, pubs and galleries moved to the street due to its low rents and unique social and urban character. As a result of this economic transformation, the prices of apartments soared in the neighborhood and this rise has had an enormous impact on the housing situation there. There we found that most of the buildings are owned by several heirs, sharing the shares of a single property. Often, it is difficult for multiple owners to parcel out their property due to high parceling fees. Therefore, it is easier for real estate investors and developers to convince owners to sell, especially those who do not reside in the property itself, the fact which forces the others to sell, especially those with smaller shares. Many old owners see selling as a financial profit that would guarantee their old age, in the absence of any other securities.

The old tenants of Mar Mikhael's property number 641 were not able to stay in the neighborhood due to high housing prices, and thus moved out of Beirut.

This is just one of the many stories on Mar Mikhael Street.

The Tailor Michel Khayyat Between Downtown Beirut and al Khazenein Street

Michel Khayyat and his family moved to the city seeking an education in one of the capital's school. His father, a farmer, who wanted to provide the best education for his children, refused to leave his house and village and give up working the land. Therefore, he rented an apartment for his family next to the school in the al-Roum Hospital (St. George Hospital) district, visiting them from time to time. Michel grew up in this neighborhood, swarming with memories, between the train and tram stations. He still remembers how he and his friends would avoid paying five piasters for the ride, sneaking on the train from the back door.

He talks with pain about the traditions of Gemmayze Street that time wiped away. The dead would be placed in a cart pulled by two horses and when the procession passed on the street, shopkeepers would close their stores out of respect. Today death is no longer honored and funerals and weddings are held at the same time and in the same building.

Michel learned sewing at one of the capital's shops, where he gained extensive experience. When he was professionally ready, he rented a shop in Burj el Ghazal, next to Sahat al Burj, known today as Martyr's Square. He spent 29 years working in that shop, until the day Solidère forced him out of it for a small sum of money. It was the building in which Michel rented his first shop in the capital. Its owner tried to save it from the brutality of Solidère by attaching himself with a chain to the building, trying to stop the bulldozers from demolishing it. Michel recounts that the owner's resistance did not prevent the security men from untying him and pushing him away, after humiliating him in front of cameras and the local media. As punishment for his stance, the company did not pay the owner the full compensation, and carried on with the demolition as if nothing had happened.

So, Michel returned to the Roum district and opened a new shop there on Khazeneen Street, where he works to this day.

Transfer of Ownership to Local Investors Camp Hadjin

Jeanette is a resident of Camp Hadjin in the Badawi district. She lives just a few steps away from the St. George Armenian Church. Her house is very small, just 55 square meters, with a living room, a bedroom, a kitchen and a bathroom. She has been living with her husband in this house since 2000, but he died four years ago. Her daughter, a mother of two, lives with her. Jeanette works as a seamstress and does not make much money, charging LBP 2,000 for hemming pants.

The house is owned by the Aremnian Waqf, or religious endowment. The church rents out the flat for a fixed fee of USD 200, which has not changed since Jeanette moved to the area 17 years ago. Previously, Jeanette lived with her family on Mar Mikhael Street in an old lease. But in agreement with the landlord, she was evicted for a compensation she did not eventually receive. She says he had stripped her of her right.

Camp Hadjin was established as a residential project in 1929 and was dedicated to Armenian refugees who came to Beirut in 1922 fleeing the Cilicia massacres. At the time, Red Cross organizations and French mandate authorities took measures to set up thousands of tents in the Karantina district. From 1926 onwards, and at the initiative of Armenian associations and assistance from the mandate authorities, permanent solutions were proposed for the resettlement of Armenian refugees outside the camp. As a result, they were gradually moved to areas adjacent to Karantina, such as Camp Hadjin, which historically consists of three large properties of a total area of 25,000 square meters. The Compatriatic Union of Hadjin has bought the properties, annexed and re-parceled them to house 400 families. The main system of the project prohibits demolition in the neighborhood, even with the passage of time.

For decades, Camp Hadjin allowed for housing arrangements that made it possible for low-income social groups to find housing. But despite the prohibition of demolition, there is a big property-buying movement in the neighborhood. Since 1992, the ownership of 21 properties has been transferred, 5 of which are occupied by old tenants and 8 bought by the brothers Ara and Mher Dakessian one of which is located on Armenia Street and is being converted into a restaurant.

(Maps and Pictures - copyrights of Public Works Studio)

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: A Crisis with Many Heads

Wassef Awada*

There is nothing more difficult than dealing with the Syrian crisis and its social, living, economic, security and political repercussions on the neighboring country of Lebanon.

When one talks about the presence of more than 1.5 million Syrian refugees on Lebanese soil, he is torn between two contradictory factors. The first is the burden placed by this number of refugees on a country whose resident citizens are under four million. The second factor is the humanitarian aspect of those poor people forced to flee their homes for all those years as a result of the war in Syria, with most of them living in conditions that could not be farther from decent and humane living standards.

No one can understand the condition of refugees, displacement and migration better than the Lebanese, who had suffered from the civil war for long years. But at the same time the repercussions of the Syrian refugee crisis on the lives and living conditions of the Lebanese cannot be overlooked, as the war drags on with no end in sight, and in light of the international failure to help Lebanon deal with this mounting crisis.

Beyond the figures and statistics, it is no longer a secret that the Syrian refugee crisis is becoming exacerbated, which is a sign of more intractable problems to come. At the beginning of July, the Lebanese government addressed this issue with much attention, but political disaccord about solutions prevented taking the right decision on this problem, although everybody agrees on the return of the refugees to their homeland, and without an alternative solution on the horizon.

It is also no secret that the Lebanese are feeling the weight of this displacement. This feeling in some takes on an inhumane character, which is justified by those who harbor it by the deterioration of services and job competition, as Syrian labor is offered at low prices, in addition to some security problems resulting from the infiltration of armed militants of refugee camps and the marked increase in crime in Lebanon in recent times.

In conclusion, there are no ready-made solutions for this crisis to provide a final and radical conclusion, unless the Syrian crisis finds a lasting solution. Its impact, nevertheless, can be mitigated. But this would require international, Lebanese and Syrian coordination to find gauges and safe havens in Syria that would prompt a part of Syrian refugees to return to their country in safe conditions. It is futile to look for other solutions, such as the one put forward by some regarding the organization of Syrian presence in Lebanon. The Lebanese State, with its modest resources and political conditions, is incapable of organizing the affairs of its own citizens appropriately. It is delusional to expect it to organize the affairs of others on Lebanese soil.

* Lebanese journalist
Journalists' Union board member

Artwork by artist and clown Dima Nachawi

The artwork focuses on the positive relations between Syrians and Lebanese. It highlights the interaction and the exchange of experiences in the field of culture and art. It also reflects the similarity between the demands of the civil society movements in the two countries so as to activate the roles of citizens, both males and females, in political and civil life.

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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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