

# The Peace Building in Lebanon

News Supplement

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## Special Edition

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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.

© «Being Dead», Sam Atallah, 27, the «Memory of War Through Your Lens» competition



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The Memory of War Through  
Your Lens



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## To a Better Future

These are exciting times, as Lebanon is holding the long-delayed parliamentary elections, the first in nearly a decade, in May 2018.

In this context, the Lebanese media will once again have to take on its vital watchdog role, serving as a forum for public debate and a voter educator.

Just like traditional media, social media too can reflect the spirit of social change and political mobilization. That is why Lebanese citizens are increasingly turning to social media platforms to follow election news. It is their way of holding candidates accountable and engaging with them in political debate. However, what the new media lack is the expertise of traditional media. Social media can at times offer misleading or false information about candidates and their campaigns.

In this supplement, we shed light on the role of elections in good governance and conflict prevention. Using this traditional medium, we want to turn our platform – this supplement – into a tool for fostering citizenship, knowledge sharing, and inclusion. In this issue, we also discuss the Lebanese civil war, radicalism and violent extremism.

We hope that this will be an enjoyable read.

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

## Bullets and Ballots

Remembering the Lebanese civil war comes easy; healing its wounds does not. Lebanon and the Lebanese are still suffering from the heavy toll of the economic, social, developmental, political and psychological remnants of the civil war, which ended 27 years ago. Since then, many Lebanese have been striving to come to terms with the past. Such a long and cumbersome struggle entails addressing the root causes of the conflict and coping with the memory and consequences of past violence as a pre-condition for long-term reconciliation. Research on the consequences of civil wars suggests clear linkages between the ability to address the impact of the past and the potential to develop sustainable peace. Coming to terms and addressing the past should, therefore, be an important element for the Lebanese in jointly shaping a

sustainable future and building durable peace.

In addition, it is widely acknowledged that responsive and accountable institutions, together with effective governance based on the rule of law, have a key role to play in sustaining peace and promoting sustainable development. The forthcoming Parliamentary elections – scheduled on May 6, 2018 – will be an important milestone in strengthening the legitimacy of Lebanon's state institutions, as well as a critical moment for the Lebanese to make their voices heard and getting across their vision for the country and its future.

**Celine Moyroud**  
UNDP Country Director

## Gunfire Has Ceased, Yet Maturity Is Still Out of Sight

If there is one thing that the Lebanese agree on – fortunately – that is never falling back into inter-communal violence. It took 15 years of an internecine civil war and nearly as many years of fragile peace under Syrian tutelage to understand and be convinced that no community can hope to control one day all the others and impose its political discourse on the entire population. Even Hezbollah, which holds virtually uncontested sway over Lebanon's Shiites and disposes of an impressive arsenal, has given signals indicating that it would not take unilateral action against Israel, except in the case of an attack in South Lebanon.

The issue of violence thus apparently shrugged off, it remains for Lebanon to address the thorny problem of political and economic reforms, an area in which practically everything has to be started all over again. Especially getting over the legendary procrastination, which has so far meant that the most pressing issues are constantly referred from one government to the next, finally to be hastily dealt with and make a botch of the job!

The two most recent examples are the new electoral law and the draft budget for 2018. The former is an abysmal mix of proportional representation and communitarian preferential voting, which has come to obfuscate the voters. As for the 2018 budget, it was patched together under pressure from international investors, overshadowing the necessary structural reforms and stopping short at a 20% cut in spending imposed on the various ministries.

In Lebanon, gunfire has indeed ceased. All that the political class needs now is a measure of maturity to be able to admit that governance is above all public service.

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

## Article 50 and What it Means for Foreigners

The controversy over Article 50 of the State Budget Law of 2018, which provides for granting a residence permit to every person who acquires an apartment or house in Lebanon, goes on without a serious examination of the pros prior to the cons, which may be strictly limited if legal controls are put into place to avoid potential serious consequences. This is what terrifies a segment of the Lebanese who fear for the country's demography and thus its fate.

On the positive side, the article encourages investment in Lebanon by encouraging the acquisition of apartments, thus boosting the real estate market. In my humble opinion, there is no fear of foreign ownership as long as sales are limited to apartments and not large plots of land. "This article has been amended for the better, after granting permanent residence, it now grants only temporary residence," says MP Ibrahim Kanaan. "And it does not contradict the law on the foreign acquisition, nor are foreigners able to acquire through it in violation of the law on foreign acquisition of property." The current acquisition law governs the implementation of the controversial Article 50 and was unanimously adopted by Parliament. Residency permits in Lebanon do not confer the right to nationality. All workers receive residence and work permits that are renewed periodically, but they do not offer any legal advantage for temporary residents to be granted nationality and they have nothing to do with resettlement.

On the negative side, there are fears that the Syrian government may deny the rights of its citizens who fled the country or opposed the regime, not allowing them to return, which would make their stay in Lebanon permanent, even if they do not get citizenship. This is a violation of Lebanon's fragile composition.

However, this debate should not reflect on the treatment of Syrians, or any other foreigner for that matter, because it's a slippery slope towards reprehensible racism, which should be avoided to preserve the Lebanon that we wish to preserve.

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



# Extremism, Religious Institutions and Civilian Societies

Dr. Radwan El Sayyed\*

Evidently, religious extremism came before terrorism. It has evolved in three stages: first came fears of Westernization of society and the state, followed by the quest for legitimacy and finally deeming religion as the bedrock of that legitimacy. The third stage, during the 1960s and 1970s, saw a schism between Islamic revivalists over how to achieve legitimacy. Theorists on the «Islamic solution» chose one of two ways: realizing a legitimate Islamic state gradually to finally arrive at establishing it or resorting to violence to achieve this on the ground. The origin of extremism is that Islam is at once a religion and a state and saying that religion can only be re-imposed by the authority of the state, which should be led by Islamists. Therefore, the two groups – those advancing gradual change and those calling for battle – are originally in theory one.

What was the position of religious institutions regarding this development, and what were the positions of modernist thinkers and civilians? The modernists began to talk about liberation from «religious heritage» to be able to move into modernity. Therefore, even before religious violence emerged, they already felt that religious institutions were either weak or complicit, and in any case, they had failed in their work of managing religion and should be radically reformed or dispensed with.

The religious institutions had not settled the matter of Islam being a religion and a state. This statement has had its dissidents among ideologue revivalists among non-traditional scholars. Therefore, they did not protest much to that statement advanced by the groups defending gradual change, and joined them reluctantly and uncomfortably, calling for the codification of *Sharia* and then application. But these institutions seemed very concerned about the «religious violence» that began to spread in the 1970s in social milieus, and sided with the authorities of national states that confronted the violence directed against it, without reconsidering the founding statement of that violence. This was the case until the al-Qaeda attacks on the United States, when «Islamic terrorism» became a global problem. What violent extremists put forward was the idea of two camps: the camp of faithful believers and that of the non-believers, or *kuffar*. Since then, and for the first time, confronting violence in the name of Islam has become the priority for these institutions, replacing their constant preoccupation debating the secularists. Later the issue of excessive politicization of religion was back resurfaced when ISIS extremists announced the establishment of the Islamic State caliphate. For the first time, religious institutions deemed politicization to be harmful for religion, and that the religion-state dichotomy made religion vulnerable to the conflicts and divisions around it, rather than being a factor for unity, harmony and peacefulness.

Today, extremism, according to scholars of religious institutions, involves *takfir* of the other, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, the state becoming one of the pillars of religion, and its legitimacy hinging on it or on asserting it, as its dogmatic nature may lead to violence towards states, societies and the world. It is therefore necessary to combat it and its manifestations, whether violent or isolationist.

When we talk of religious institutions in the Arab world, we are referring to Al-Azhar in Egypt, the Saudi religious establishment and the Moroccan religious establishment. These were followed by the Jordanian religious establishment. They been active over the last ten years in several internal and external directions,

at times in cooperation between them. They have **held** conferences and workshops; **worked** to rectify distorted concepts, such as religions, *sharia* and *jihad*, the promotion of virtue and the prevention of vice, and the relationships between religion and state; **established** centers and institutions for the training of imams and teachers; **worked** to change educational programs; and **worked** on openness to religious institutions in the modern world. It has three main objectives: **combatting** the **phenomena** of extremism and violence in order to prevent the emergence of new generations; **restoring peacefulness** and continuity in societies; and **changing** the image of Islam in the world, which has led to exacerbating Islamophobia phenomena.

Of course, all these activities require internal structural reforms in these institutions, as they have been feeble, lagging in terms of knowledge and organization, and subjected to pressures and constraints from the political authorities in the past decades. The necessary reforms can be described in two terms: **qualification** and **rehabilitation**. Qualification refers to the reconstruction of knowledge and organization. When it comes to knowledge building, institutional scholars were caught unawares by the phenomena of extremism and violence, which they had not foreseen and had no answers to. Therefore, they have set out today to learn about societies using scientific approaches, and, more intensively, to send missions to specialize in social sciences, in the philosophy of religion, in learning about

other religions and their experiences with modernity, in the training on dialogue and new educational means and access to the world of communication. Al-Azhar has established a large observatory to monitor the movement of the world and the Muslim world in particular. **Rehabilitation** involves training in communication with the public and with students and young people, setting up specialized or research institutes in traditional religious sciences colleges, and cooperating with similar institutes around the world. There are few extremists and terrorists among the ranks of those educated in religious institutes and universities. The extremists have actually been fashioned by the different religious schools of those groups. But the issue remains to be the ability to influence young men and women, which requires new knowledge, new methods and new dispositions.

Just as the institutions still lack much to rebuild and renew the discourse and make it more effective, they also lack cooperation with intellectuals and media professionals. The two groups are still very averse to religious institutions, given their conservatism and rigidity. This is a negative phenomenon that must be overcome and staved off, because the challenges are huge, and there is a strong need for cooperation, solidarity and exchange of experiences, in order to confront threats to religion and the state.

At a conference against extremism organized by Al-Azhar and the Muslim World League, three goals were put forward that should be pursued by everyone working together: restoring peacefulness in religion, rescuing the national state and amending relations with the world.

Much work has already been done over the past decade. But the challenges of the religious turmoil, which menace countries and societies, are still there. Hence the duty to continue the fight against extremism and terrorism, which would help people regain trust in their religion and themselves in the Arab countries, and the countries of the West and East. Peacefulness remains a key term in this regard. It is the clearest explanation of what moderate Islam means. Achieving peacefulness among sensitive people and local communities requires a new discourse that tackles several things (according to Al-Azhar declarations): prohibiting *takfir* and violence, promoting brotherhood among people, condemning politicization of Islam by all means possible and working with people to establish good governance.

**Today, extremism, according to scholars of religious institutions, involves *takfir* of the other, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, the state becoming one of the pillars of religion, and its legitimacy hinging on it or on asserting it, as its dogmatic nature may lead to violence towards states, societies and the world. It is therefore necessary to combat it and its manifestations, whether violent or isolationist**

\* Professor of Islamic Studies

# «Islamic State»: A Desire or a Recognition To Be The Case of Tripoli

Dr. Marie Kortam\*

**This paper studies aspirations towards an Islamic State in Tripoli, Lebanon. It seeks to deconstruct the dominant discourse maintaining that there is a Jihadist threat in Tripoli advocating for the establishment of a *khilafa* or an Islamic state. It appears that a sense of injustice<sup>(1)</sup> is at the root of this aspiration to Islamic governance. To achieve this, I used observation of Sunnis in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Tripoli of various political trends and sociological profiles and in-depth, comprehensive interviews with inhabitants, key personalities and Sheikhs from the middle and old city of Tripoli<sup>(2)</sup>.**

For almost a century, Tripoli has been accumulating difficulties. Economic, political and social factors (Nehmeh, 2013), united for more than a century, aggravated by the failure of Lebanese politics and the civil war, have created a climate of general insecurity. Victim of poverty, segregation, marginality, fatalism and inequality, Tripoli presents the image of a city incubating «terrorism», while its poor disadvantaged and injustice-stricken population is claiming constantly its «right to the city» by all means and with all possible political alliances. With the death of Rafic Hariri, and disappointed several times by their leader Saad Hariri<sup>(3)</sup>, the majority of Sunnis in Tripoli feel betrayed by their representatives. Accompanied by the Syrian crisis in 2011, Islamism popularised the Salafi Jihadist currents in Tripoli and promoted the emergence of multiple violent radical movements, which clearly bore a desire for Khilafa and a rejection of the modern state. From now on, this community is divided into several groups of various affinities and political alliances, among them the radical Islamists and violent radical Islamists.

The feeling of injustice puts some Sunni groups in motion, gives them the courage to confront and act strongly and fuels resentment. It is based on a lack of recognition in social and political life, where inconsistent differences and inequalities between citizens are constantly exposed. Shared indignation brings them closer to each other and unites them to face the arbitrariness and domination of the Lebanese Government.

Among them, some aspire to an Islamic

State and others are less enthusiastic about this idea. The aspiration to an Islamic State has its roots in the «social vacuum» (Barel, 1982) that these Sunnis excluded from Tripoli live. The latter no longer find their place in a society that has become alien to itself, their daily lives no longer have any meaning and they no longer recognise themselves in social bands.

The relationship to the idea of an Islamic State oscillates between desire and rejection. Indeed, this notion of «Islamic State» does not have consensus among my interlocutors and therefore seems problematic in their way of defining it. For the most part, the notion of an Islamic State refers essentially to the demand for the application of Koranic laws in a State that remains Muslim, inclusive, unifying and moderating. For them, the state's role is the guardianship of religion, where the Koranic law itself would be perceived as the guarantor of social and legal life, in a state where everyone is free in his beliefs in the private sphere. This group of «inclusive» Muslims is composed mainly of individuals who have lived through the Lebanese war and have passed from one ideology to another, they are not far from the 50 years or beyond. They believe in justice through democracy and Islam, and they believe that an Islamic State, and not the Islamic State (ISIS), could be just and equal, they see a utopia in an Islamic State that can govern fairly, a state where the laws applied will be the Koranic laws. They support the idea of an Islamic State, which is well supported by the various Islamist movements, like the Muslim brotherhood in Turkey. Such as an Islamised society, without really wanting the realisation of an Islamic State as implemented by Islamist regimes by force by Islamising the whole population.

It is a very different aspiration from the «Islamic State» claimed by the «hot-

tempered Islamists» which includes: Islamist, Salafist and/or arbitrary Jihadist movements since the 1980's. It impregnates the political imaginary of the Tripolitan Islamist movements and imposes Islam by violence. This group is mainly formed of young people between 18 and 30. Their first engagement is reflected in the Syrian revolution and they have known only the Islamist ideology and known sectarianism in Lebanon. The essential difference between these two groups is above all a generational one, and their different experiences among struggle to defend political causes and struggle to defend communities. Then, a conceptual divide them, for the former, the Islamic State is the first guarantor of freedom of choice for non-Muslims, while for the latter the Islamic State must impose religion by force.

However, for both the «Sunnis inclusive» and the «hot-tempered Islamists», Islam structures their sense of justice and specifies by its laws the rules of justice. These rules are essentially for these Sunni groups to occupy an influential political position and become political actors. They challenge a political inequality based on belonging to the Sunni community as political revindication. Although this revindication is not inherently structured by Islam and conveyed by Islamic law, it has become that, after the failure of the progressive and Marxist nationalist currents to make this reclaim.

Fighting against injustice (Guienne, 2001), Tripoli has done so for a long time. Some Sunni groups in Tripoli have changed ideology and banners, but no cause and no fight. In an aspiration for justice (Rawls, 1987), now according to an Islamist ideology, the Sunnis groups claim a «just» State (Ricoeur, 1995). Inclusive Sunnis designate the «hot-tempered-Islamists» as responsible for the situation of division and violent

extremism. They are mostly against their practices which in their eyes have no connection to Islamic governance.

These inclusive Sunnis believe that Tripoli is not a fertile land for building an Islamic State according to the Daech model. Tripoli is a socially and religiously mixed city, with a rich social and historical heritage, as Mahmoud Mikati, an official in the municipality of Tripoli and a resident of the old city, says.

Even the Jihadist Salafists, who form a sub-group of «hot-tempered Islamists», are completely in favour of an Islamic State imposed from above and by force, however, they find that Daech, in its present form, cannot extend to Lebanon, since it does not have the image of a resistant group of liberation, and that many doubts hang over this organisation, as Sheikh Salem al-Rafei, a Salafi Jihadist Sheikh in Tripoli, said in an interview with him on November 10, 2014.

Nevertheless, through the demand for an Islamic State, the two groups aspire to a just and egalitarian state, that is, in conformity with the Koranic law and respecting equality as presented in the Quran. Thus, the principles of justice and equality are part of a political and social framework of an Islamic State and not of the Islamic State (Daech) for the first group, but both aspire to proportionate regards, equal promises and equal shares.

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\* Associate Researcher, French Institute for the Near East

(1) This feeling has a historical roots starting by Sykes-Picot agreement. The latter caused a problem of belonging to inhabitants in Tripoli.

(2) My fieldwork was carried out in Tripoli over different periods between 2014 and 201.

(3) His visit to Syria, the reconciliation between Jabal Mohsen and Tebbeneh and his participation in the new government.



# Enumerating Palestinian Refugees and Debunking Myths

**Dr. Hassan Krayem\***

Following the Nakba in 1948, around 100,000 Palestinian refugees fled to Lebanon. The Palestinian-Lebanese relations have passed through various stages of agreement and disaccord. They were controlled by the Army and the «second bureau» until the late 1960s and later came under the control of the armed factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) until the 1982 Israeli invasion. In the second part of the 1980s, a blockade was imposed on the camps.

There has been widespread belief among the Lebanese and the Arabs that the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon may be as high as 500,000, or 400,000 by modest estimates. Indeed, Lebanese state records reveal that there were 592,711 Palestinian refugees registered in the Lebanese General Security registers, in December 2016, and 459,292 refugees registered with the UNRWA in March 2016.

The general population and housing census of Palestinian camps and gatherings in Lebanon carried out by the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC), the Central Administration of Statistics and the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in 2017 found that there were only 174,422 Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon and an additional 18,601 Palestinian refugees were displaced from Syria to Lebanon.

Those who question the veracity of these figures should know that:

1. This is a valid, comprehensive and qualitative census, which is the first of its kind and based on strong scientific base with high credibility.

The census was carried out by the Lebanese and Palestinian statistics bodies under the supervision of the LPDC. It covers all the residents of the 12 camps recognized by the Lebanese government, including their non-Palestinian residents. These camps are: Burj Barajneh, Shatila, Mar Elias, Dbayeh, Ein El Hilweh, Mieh Mieh, Rashidieh, El Buss, Burj Shemali, Wavel or Al Jalil, Nahr el-Bared and Beddawi, and the 156 Palestinian «gatherings». These gatherings were defined as informal settlements outside camp perimeters with 15 or more Palestinian households. They are divided into two groups: the gatherings bordering camps as a result of expansion, such as Nahr el-Bared in the North and Sabra-Tarik Jedida in Beirut, and other gatherings in villages and urban areas, which are vast areas that include suburbs of cities and towns, such as the Jal el Bahr gathering, Chouf villages and in the various quarters and old city of Saida.

More than 1,000 young men and women as well as many local, Palestinian, Lebanese and international experts were involved in this census. The census relied on advanced modern techniques, such as the use of tablets that are centrally linked to a sophisticated data-collection and monitoring system.

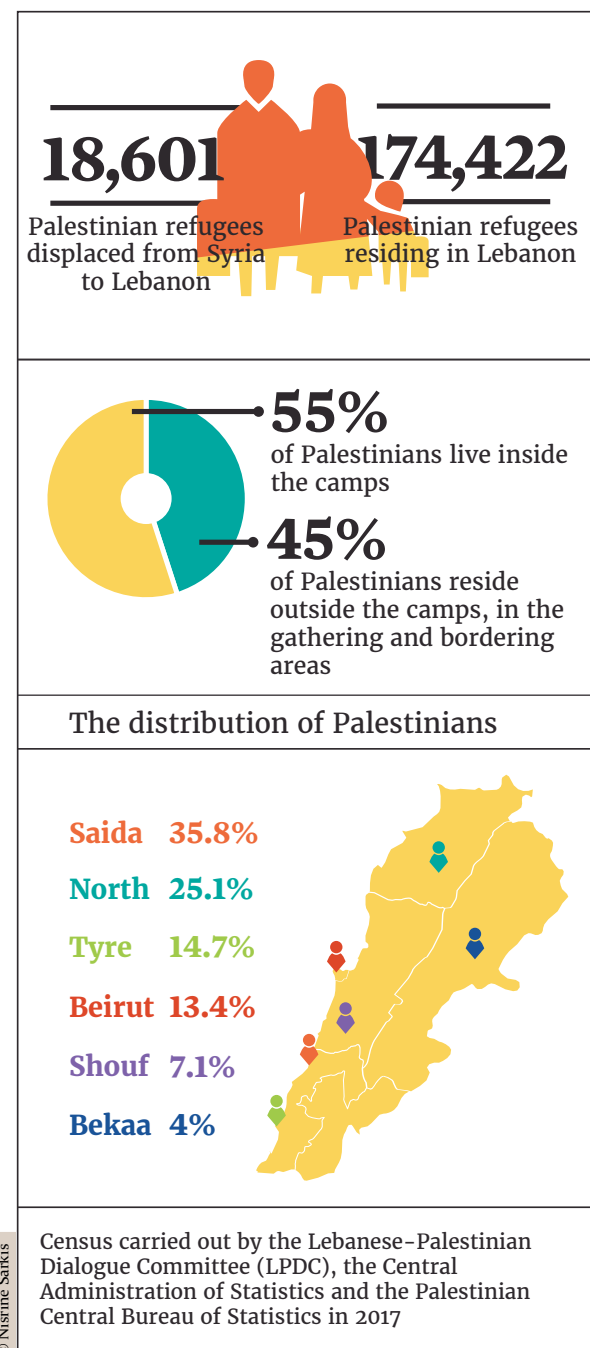
2. This census included all buildings; residential and non-residential units belonging to the Palestinian camps and gatherings on the Lebanese territory, and it developed a geographic information system for all buildings in Palestinian camps and gatherings.

3. Trained field teams from four levels were engaged: field researchers, team leaders, district coordinators and facilitators. The actual population count (of Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians and Arabs) was carried out in all regions simultaneously between July 17 and July 30, 2017. The enumerators canvassed all households and asked more than 90 questions in a questionnaire covering the demographic, economic, scientific, social

and housing features of the entire population.

4. The total population was found to be 237,614, a figure which includes, in addition to Palestinian refugees from Lebanon and Syria, 30,368 Syrians, 12,832 Lebanese and 1,390 other nationalities.

The distribution of Palestinians showed that 45% of them live inside the camps while 55% reside outside the camps, in the gathering and bordering areas. Palestinian refugees are distributed across the following places:



5. 4.9% of Palestinians hold a nationality other than the Palestinian nationality. 7.2% of the refugees are illiterate while 93.6% have been enrolled in schools between the ages of 3 and 13 or above. The rate of unemployment reached 18.4% and is higher among young people, reaching 28.5% for those between the ages of 20 and 29. Palestinians represent 72.8% of residents in the camps, with the rest of the population made up of Syrians, Lebanese and other Arab nationalities. The average household size is just 4 members. It is worth noting that the Palestinians have almost become a minority in some important camps, such as Shatila where they represent 29.7% of the population compared to 57.6% Syrians; Mar Elias where they represent 42.3% compared to 39% Syrians; Dbayeh where they are 42.8% compared to 38.9% Lebanese; and in Burj Barajneh where they are 44.8% compared to 47.9% Syrians.

6. Another debunked myth relates to the total number of Palestinians married to Lebanese women. There were only 3,707 such cases, or about 2% of the current residing Palestinian population of 174,422. The percentage of Palestinian women married to Lebanese was under 1%, with a total number of 1,219 cases only.

In conclusion, there must be an explanation for such a low number of Palestinian refugees. There is no doubt that the reasons involve, first and foremost, the general policies adopted by the Lebanese State, the tightening the noose on employment, housing, education, health and all ways of life, in addition to the impact of the civil war and siege of the Palestinians in the camps, especially in the 1980s. These factors have prompted the Palestinian refugees to leave Lebanon and seek asylum abroad, so that the number dropped to include those who were left stranded in Lebanon or those who chose to remain in Lebanon despite all the hardships.

In this sense, this census is an opportunity for the Lebanese government to reconsider its policies towards Palestinian refugees and to amend the legislation to allow rights for employment, property ownership, education and mobility, and to preserve their civil and human rights. These issues will form the heart of LPDC's work in the coming period.

\* UNDP Governance Portfolio Manager and Professor of Political Studies at the American University of Beirut

# Oral History: An Invaluable Contribution to Civil Peace and Dialogue

**Dr. Maria Bashshur Abunnasr\***

Oral history is a practice and a theory. In practice, oral history is an audio or video recording of historical information obtained through an interview that contributes to an understanding of the past. Often described as the oldest method of historical research, oral history was used, for example, by Herodotus, the Ancient Greek «father of history,» and his student Thucydides to collect oral testimonies and write their histories. But oral history is more than interviewing, «it is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events.»<sup>(1)</sup>

Oral history, as we know it today, emerged in the 1960s with the invention of the portable tape recorder and was galvanized by the social activism of the feminist, anti-war, and civil rights movements. Indeed, researchers from many disciplines (historians, anthropologists, sociologists, folklorists, etc.) took to the street to collect the everyday experiences of ordinary people, to record history from the bottom up, thus challenging traditional top-down historical narratives dominated by the «great men» and «great events» of the past. With its popular appeal and hands-on approach, oral history brought history down from its ivory tower to make a different kind of history based on dialogue and exchange.

## What makes oral history different?

What also makes oral history different is its very orality, its subjectivity, its reliance on memory, and the relationships it fosters: between memory and history, past and present, and interviewer and narrator. Oral history's dependence on memory as both subject and source, however, is what contributes to perceptions of its unreliability as a historical source. As History became established as a formal academic discipline in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, scientific objectivity was determined by historical scholarship based on written archival sources. But even in the archives, documents are selected by archivists and translated from legal court (oral) records, and objectivity or pure historical truth is itself unattainable. Indeed, oral historian Alessandro Portelli argues that «what makes oral history different is that it tells us less about events than about their meaning.»<sup>(2)</sup> Oral history interviewing puts the question of subjectivity at the center of the interview and allows interviewers to ask not only «what happened», but also, «how do you feel about what happened?» The collection of interviews, subject to analysis and critical inquiry, provides a closer understanding of what the past means to those who lived through it, thereby making it more accessible, tangible, and relevant to people's lives.

## Oral history in Lebanon

While several important initiatives have been established with academic institutions such as the American University of Beirut, the University of Balamand, and the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik, oral history remains an untapped resource in



© Photo by Ramzi Haidar, 1984, in a castle in Aley during the Mountain War

Lebanon. It has largely been civil society actors and NGOs, such as forumZFD, UMAM Documentation and Research, and Fighters for Peace who have experimented with oral history methods to take on the challenge of addressing Lebanon's recent past, namely the civil war. In the absence of a unified national history curriculum, these organizations, in partnership with the Lebanese Association for History, have played vital roles in trying to bring teaching about the war into public and private school classrooms. While not the only post-conflict society with no revised national history curriculum, Lebanon cannot move forward as a society if its official history ends in 1943. History education is inarguably critical to building national identity and ensuring civil peace. When dealing with contested histories, incorporating an oral history approach into a history curriculum is one way of broaching sensitive issues.

## How oral history can contribute to civil peace in Lebanon

Oral history is, above all, about listening and listening to a diversity of voices. If there is one

feature that Lebanon prides itself on, in regional and global terms, it is its diversity. In this context, the logical step is to move away from stymied attempts to agree on a single narrative approach to Lebanon's past and instead focus on building a multiple narrative approach that celebrates diversity and fosters understanding of the multiple perspectives of the past. Oral history gives students access to individual historical experiences, and in the case of the war, showcases the futility of violence as a means to conflict resolution. In this sense, oral history works not only to prevent «history repeating itself,» but also contests the reductive maxim that «history is told by the victor.» Moreover, the oral history learning experience empowers teachers and students to work together as partners and participants in the making of history. Based on mutual respect and understanding, oral history can make invaluable contributions to civil peace in Lebanon and act as a platform to encourage dialogue, acceptance, and a history of diversity.

*\*Oral historian and independent researcher*

(1) Oral History Association: [www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/](http://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/)

(2) Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (CUNY, 1991)



# Lay the Dead to Rest, Put the Minds of their Families at Rest

Wadad Halawani\*

«Even if they bring me the remains of my son, I would recognize them. Even if my son turned to bones, I would recognize my son. They can't give me the bones of a dog. There are marks I know. I know if the remains are his or not.» This is an excerpt of Moussa Jadaa's comments in 1997 denouncing the law issued with the title «The rules to be followed to prove the death of missing persons»\*.

It seemed that Mr. Jadaa, who died less than a year after those words, had foreseen or, perhaps warned of the State possibly resorting to manipulations regarding the fate of those who were abducted by the war and the feelings of their families. He died before discovering the fate of his son and brother, and before the serial show of mass graves story began to unfold.

In January 2000, succumbing to pressure from the Our Right to Know campaign launched by the Committee of the Families of the Disappeared and Missing and its supporters, an «official committee» was established to investigate victims and determine their fate. Six months later, this committee published a report with the results of its work. The report stated that it had not found any living and that it had found mass graves, naming several ones. According to the report, it was impossible to identify the buried remains, as they had been buried for a long time, and Lebanon lacked the laboratory and techniques required for such tests. It was also impossible to carry out these tests abroad because of the high costs that the State treasury would incur.

What is most painful about the matter is that the Lebanese authorities have not taken any steps since then regarding these graves in accordance with the rules and procedures stipulated in international laws and treaties, particularly the First, Second and Fourth Geneva Conventions. The State assumed that this collective obituary, not based on any concrete evidence, would put an end to the dossier of the missing by declaring them dead. Its evidence is the existence of mass graves across Lebanon.

Following the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation army from Lebanon, the domino effect set off the discovery of mass graves in several areas, especially in Southern Lebanon and the Bekaa. The same happened following Syria's withdrawal. Perhaps shedding light on this matter would contribute to raising public awareness about this inhumane phenomenon, set right the official handling of it to show respect for the missing and their families, and pave the way to closing this dossier. For its closure would be the closure of the last of war dossiers in Lebanon.

Anyone keeping track of the official course of action would note the absence of professionalism and competence, and the disregard for international rules and standards for dealing with graves. Moreover this uncovers the flagrant politicizing of the matter in both shedding light on graves in certain areas, covering them up in others whether to the timing of discoveries or exhumations.

The discovery of the Anjar gravesite in the Bekaa and another discovery in the vicinity of the Ministry of Defense in Baabda in 2005 sparked a war of public statements between the rival parties of the war, most of whose leaders are now in power. This war began with shirking responsibility and finger pointing at each other, then alternately pointing the finger at Israel and Syria, followed by appealing to international courts, to finally turn into hurling the remains of the missing, contemptuous of the dignity of the dead and the feelings of families.

In addition, the subject was raised in Parliament during a Q&A session\*\*. Unfortunately, no answers have been provided to date, while the questions are ever growing. The Government's promise remains unfulfilled, after the Prime Minister and one of his ministers confirmed

that they would discuss the subject of mass graves at the earliest meeting of the cabinet. They also said that they will promptly request an international investigation into the matter as it was found that there was a need for international expertise in forensic medicine and evidence gathering\*\*\*. The subject has not been put on the agenda of the Council of Ministers to this day. Perhaps it was considered a controversial subject warranting the application of the now customary policy of «disassociation»!

The Human Rights Parliamentary Committee was quick to denounce through its chairman the indiscriminate digging up of mass graves, in violation of human dignity and the international rules applied in such cases, as was the case in Anjar. The Committee promised to hold a meeting in the presence of the relevant ministries and the International Committee of the Red Cross to set standards for the exhumation of graves and the identification of remains using forensic tools and DNA analysis\*\*\*\*.

It does not matter whether the standards meeting took place, as standards already exist in this field. What matters is that those concerned have not yet begun to apply them. Could it be that the reason is that the subject is outside the scope of the sectarian quota system? Or maybe...

There are many gravesites and the official attitude towards them is intriguing. The topic requires volumes to cover. I will content myself with recounting one incident. In 2011, there was rallying around the news following the discovery of a mass grave in the town of Shabaniyah. Then there was rushing to wrap it up with a baffling statement that deemed the bones packed in plastic bags as belonging to goats and not to humans, without examining them and preventing anyone from reaching the site.

Buck passing followed the release of a report in 2013 on the remains of unidentified bodies, piled up since war years in the Mount Lebanon morgue in the Baabda Government Hospital, saying that their storage was getting in the way of work in the morgue and giving off unpleasant odors. And three ministers pointed the finger at each other for the responsibility of burying them!

Several ministers lined up in the dignitaries' reception room at Rafic Hariri International Airport to see off the coffin of French researcher Michel Seurat in 2006. How unpalatable was the smug smile of the authorities as they returned Seurat's remains to his family!

Two bodies were found in Kallet ez Zaiti in the hills of Aita al-Foukhar. The remains of British journalist Alec Collett were identified and taken to the American University of Beirut hospital. How appalling and cruel was that moment in 2009 when the British journalist was dug out of the grave while the body of an unidentified man found buried next to him was re-buried!

What is even more appalling and stranger is that the Lebanese State has no DNA save except that of Michel Seurat and Alec Collett.

Only Odette Salem, a family member of the missing, got her DNA sample to be stored. Of course, this wouldn't have happened had she not been tragically killed by a speeding car as she crossed the street to the families protest tent. Odette entrusted us to find Richard and Mary Christine, for whom she waited 24 years and passed away before they returned or were buried.

The general hope remains that all mothers will «spit out»\*\*\*\*\* their painful histories and the identities of their loved ones. With the hope that the saliva samples will be properly stored, for these samples are testimonies to the truth. They are the nation's legacy.

The Lebanese State has still to accept the families' demands and end its dereliction. It must take on its duties. Nothing is lost according to nature's laws. Nature does not lose one human being. It loses nothing and allows nothing to be lost. What happened decades ago was a process of disappearing people. Their families have the right to know their location. Since the State declared the death of the missing in its 2000 report, why not clear the way for burying them?

Identifying human remains is a matter of dignity. Transferring them to their families for burial is a fundamental matter that will put their minds at ease, allowing them to mourn, end this vicious state of waiting and go back to something that resembles a life. Observing the struggle of the Committee of the Families reveals that what it is demanding is no longer confined to learning the fate of the missing – without diminishing from its seriousness – but goes further the pursuit of peace and finding a homeland. The families of the missing are a diverse group of religious communities, denominations, regions and professions, and the missing have no sectarian affiliation. Either the State looks at them as citizens or it neglects them. The missing persons cause has no sectarian solution. It is precisely for this reason that the Committee believes that solving this may be the salvation for the State to rise up and consolidate its institutions, instead of continuing on this path of sinking further while watching the countries around it burn and be torn apart.

This is in hope that the 43th commemoration of the war will be the start of serious work to turn the page by closing the last and most cruel of its dossiers. So that the living can bring peace to the souls of Moussa Jadaa, Odette Salem, the mother of Ali Jabr, the mother of Mohamed Hirbawi, and to all of those who passed away before learning the fate of their loved ones, can rest.

\*Law No. 434 of May 15, 1995 was issued under pressure from the Committee of the Families. Instead of meeting the demand for the right to know, it allowed families who wished to declare their missing dead to do so without the need for proof or evidence.

\*\*As-Safir newspaper, December 7, 2005

\*\*\*As-Safir newspaper, December 8, 2005

\*\*\*\*As-Safir newspaper, April 26, 2006

\*\*\*\*\*As-Safir newspaper, November 20, 2009

\*\*\*\*\*The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been collecting and preserving biological samples of the families of the missing (saliva) since summer 2016 before they pass away and it becomes impossible to identify the missing persons or their remains. This process shall be handed over to the official authority once the State establishes it.

Competition

# The Memory of War Through Your Lens

What object, site, sound or person represents the civil war for you?

What is your vision of the memory and remnants of the war?

These are the questions the UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» project put to contestants for the photography competition about the memory of the Lebanese civil war.

The project organized this competition with the support of Germany, calling on participants to construct the memory of the Civil War and represent it through their lenses and the photographs that remind them of it.

The jury, which is made up of Patrick Baz, an award-winning photojournalist, Nour El Bejjani, ICTJ representative in Beirut and UNDP team, selected 11 winning photographs (including one photo that was used as the supplement's cover photo). These photos were recently taken by professional photographers and photography enthusiasts.

«This photo is a personal representation of our shelter during the civil war where my family and I used to spend lots of hours hoping and waiting for the war to end.

Even after all these years, this bathroom still evokes different emotions in me. Despite all the stress and fear that we had to go through, our family got closer and stronger.»

**Photo by Maria de Lourdes Haddad, Director, 39 years old.**  
Tayyouneh, Beirut



«Make Peace»



«Invent Yourself and Then Reinvent Yourself»

«This picture was taken in a building on the demarcation line between the warring sides. This was the Ain el-Remmaneh-Chiah crossing during the Lebanese civil war. Building showing the marks of war still stand in this area. In this empty room, a lonely chair was used by many gunmen during the war.»

**Photo by Hussein Baydoun, photojournalist, 30 years.**  
Ain el-Remmaneh





«Despite the complete destruction of this famous Lebanese residential area in downtown Beirut, a painting on the full width of the building shows a boy playing with some electronic gadgets. This symbolizes our resurrection as a nation from under our destroyed capital. In this photo, life and death are in conflict the same way they were during the Lebanese war, which constitutes a very sharp reminder of the black days of the war.»

**Photo by Habib Abboud, Financial and Administrative Consultant, 56 years.**  
Downtown Beirut

### «Renaissance»



### «Old Man»

«This man has lived through civil war. His father had died right in front of him. We can see in his eyes and face life's hardships and pain. And yet, he goes on with life, as many others like him who have experienced war, hunger and poverty.»

**Photo by Joseph Khalil, University Student, 21 years old.**



### «Saint Vincent de Paul Church»

«This is the façade of Saint Vincent de Paul Church in downtown Beirut. It was bombed in the early months of the war in 1975 and remains abandoned to this day. A renovation project is under consideration to turn this symbol of civil war into a space for interfaith dialogue.»

**Photo by Hugo Lautissier, French Journalist, 30 years old.**





### «Passage»

«I took these pictures in the backyard of my house, where my mother had turned the ammunition box into a flower pot. The box was left by the Arab Deterrent Force that was stationed near our house during the war.»  
It is all about perspective.

Photo by Manal Malaeb, University Professor, 38 years old.



### «Deadly Mortar Nights»

«It was 1982, the year of some of the most violent days of the civil war in Lebanon in general and North in particular. The sound of shelling resonated in the city of Tripoli on a night that seemed like hell. In this particular house, a family, as other families like it, huddled together to wait out the night and the end of the round of fighting. But death came sooner, as a shell exploded in this house, burning it down with everyone who was inside. Eleven civilians of one family were killed in just this one tragedy of the many caused by the civil war in Lebanon.»

Photo by Abdel Salam Wajih Seyadi, University Student, 25 years old.



### «On the Demarcation Line: There Is History Being Told and Stones That Have Heard the Story Before»

«Oh Past, do not change us... the further away we move from you! Oh Future, do not ask us: Who are you? And what do you want from me? For we have no clue either. Oh Present, bear with us a little, for we are mere dreary passersby!»

Mahmoud Darwish

This building on Monot Street in Achrafieh has been abandoned for 20 years.

Photo by Gilbert Farjallah, University Student, 22 years old.



«Almost 30 years passed since the end of the Lebanese civil war, yet Beirut is still affected by the results of this war emotionally and physically. Unfortunately, we can still see this physical damage in buildings on the Green Line that were affected directly. After all these years no clear laws exist regarding these buildings, which are completely abandoned or partially uninhabited.

The two kids in this photo live with their parents in this building in Beirut in very bad conditions, making their lives very risky. The sad part is that they pay rent to the landlord.»

**Photo by Reine Chahine, photographer, 31 years old.**



«Memory Holes»



«Lebanon Will Flourish»

«I believe that although Lebanon (the flower) has passed through rough periods, including war (the stones), it was able to flourish and survive. This picture in my opinion perfectly represents Lebanon after the war.»

**Photo taken by Sara Saeed, Student, 17 years old.**  
 Batloun, Chouf.



# On the War that Hijacked Our Lives

Najwa Barakat\*

We looked forward, with growing impatience, to mornings, at six or seven years of age, so we could put on our school uniforms and our heavy leather bags, which bore our books, lunches and worries, which are always there with such young children discovering a marvelous world painted in a broad palette of colors. We would leave for school where we sat behind wooden desks worn out by dozens of generations before us. The little girls that we were found a place for themselves at school, unlike their cramped homes where children, furniture and family returning from faraway visits to the capital Beirut would be crammed, leaving no space for the small feet to tread.

I passed by Yolla's house, which was not that far from my own. I loved to hang out with her in the small backyard, in the shade of the luxuriant loquat tree, nibbling on its fruit sometimes. We would keep our eyes on the hole that had a slab placed on it to keep that damned rat from coming out and causing us to tremble in fear. We would then walk together to school, where we would sit side by side behind the wooden desk made for two. I told Yolla that Ibrahim was seizing every opportunity to stand behind us or to play around us. She would laugh with her two long braids and her large black eyes, before being gripped by the fear that her mother had instilled deep inside her when I tell her that the mean Fairuz had cornered me in the playground to attack me for Ibrahim falling in love with both of us.

Yolla made me swear not to reveal our secret. But I did anyway as soon as I arrived home to find my mother on the balcony sewing something for us. I approached her, my legs shaking and my tongue faltering, to tell her that Ibrahim told the mean Fairuz that he was in love with us, Yolla and me. My mother didn't laugh when she saw how serious and confused I was. Her brow remained furrowed. Then she took a weight off my shoulders by saying that we should love each other at school and that was the custom, and that Fairuz should keep her mouth shut. Overjoyed, I repeated that to Yolla. And I felt that she believed me, and that I was her best friend and her family. That was how we grew, always together, until I was separated from her by transferring to another school after obtaining my first certificate.

We were apart for years. Then our beautiful war broke out. I disappeared in my village for a year, after which I went to the capital to enroll at a public high school, where I came across Yolla again. She had had her braids cut and her eyes were dewy, and they would remain that way, glistening with a vague mix of sadness and tenderness. Her father, whom she loved and resembled, was kidnapped at a checkpoint on his way from Jezzine to the capital. Nothing remained of him but his red car, contradictory news of the location of his kidnapping that black Saturday, and those responsible for him going missing. Yolla recounted to me all of this, this loss that pulled the rug from under them, of her mother's relentless search for him, and the end of innocence for her sisters who were too young to understand tragedy. I could see in her gaze, from that day onwards, a hint of defeat that would never be displaced whether by her beaming smile or her exceptional love of life.

When we were separated to attend university, each pursuing a different major, I kept dropping to see Yolla, who was now working to help support her family. She would vow «by my father's estrangement», and it would make my heart stop every time I heard it. I wondered secretly whether she really believed



© Illustration by graphic designer Mona Abi Wardé

that her father was still alive, or whether that was her way of keeping death at bay from him and herself. And why it hadn't occurred to her that he might have been killed at an armed checkpoint, like hundreds before him, and his body discarded without a trace. But Yolla kept hope alive, as news kept reaching them from here and there. So, they paid money and inquired. Then hope would die again when it would turn out that there was nothing to the promises but lies and deception.

In 1985, I left Lebanon to pursue my studies in Paris. One summer, Yolla told me she was thinking of following in my steps. This time she was trying to get away from her mother's tight grip, the pressure, and the hatred of the other who had taken her husband away. So I said to her: «Buy a plane ticket, I'm waiting for you.» Thus, Yolla left to Paris, where she was reborn and re-integrated into the world. There she came face to face with the other that the

war had depicted as an ogre and reconciled with him. Gradually, she became averse to hearing news of Lebanon, and detested going there, until she was completely cut off from it. What brought her back to it was my zeal in 2005 and our participation in protests together.

Every Monday afternoon, we walked side by side, holding up the Lebanese flag, cheering and attending meetings with those coming from there, to be filled in on events, and for them to make us feel that our presence and opinions mattered. I was engrossed in my enthusiasm and analysis, talking at length about how we were going through a historical moment, one that will never be repeated, and that finally we had awakened as a people and come together. She would look at me from that fixed distance that she had set between the country and herself, she who had lost all faith in that which had taken away from her peace of mind and adolescence and thrust her in a cauldron of loss and torment.

Despite her great weariness, Yolla had also great capacity for warmth, tolerance and acceptance of the other. She was able to share his sorrow and his joy. This added strength and energy to her that were not within the reach of anyone else. As the Cedar Revolution came to an end, I could make out in her look: «Didn't I tell that no good would come out of this country?» It was as painful for me as it was true and irrefutable. I could not cut off the umbilical cord like she had and break away from the crippled country that had filled us with sorrow and loss since the day we were born.

I remember one summer evening, as we sat in one of the beautiful squares of Paris, sipping wine and chatting about everything and nothing, suddenly blurted: «Don't you think it's time to bury your father?» She turned to me and said: «Yes, I do. It had been 36 years since his disappearance, which was almost the age at which he was kidnapped.» Then she broke into tears and said with a lump in her throat: «Rest in peace, father.»

We buried Yolla's father together that evening, we both cried for that swarthy young man whose life ended just like that, and who never lived to be our age. Then I was forced to return to Lebanon. Yolla fell ill while I was away, with the disease eating away at her lungs but not getting the better of her youthful voice, her smile or her faith in life. Just days before we were set to meet in Paris, she passed away and was buried there, under a lush canopy in an area not far from her sister's place of residence. I did not attend her funeral or visit her grave. But not a day goes by that I do not talk to her or miss her, brushing off that she is no longer with us.

\* Author and novelist, founder of «How to write a Novel» workshop



## Elections

# The Role of the Electoral Law in Promoting Civil Peace and Peacebuilding

Walid Hussein\*

There is no doubt that the principle of «periodic elections» is an important indicator of the openness of any political system and the democracy of state institutions towards citizens. Notwithstanding rigging and fraud that accompany the election process, holding periodic elections as frequently as prescribed by the constitution shows that the political power draws on the principle of consulting the people on the political and economic choices that it uses to govern them. Democratic states are founded on the rule of law and access to democratically elected institutions. Repressive or authoritarian states, on the other hand, rarely cite these principles, since they are not founded on the principle of people holding the political power accountable by casting their ballots. These countries stand out from democratic countries in that their political stability derives from suppressing or eliminating the opposition, at times under the pretext of a threat to public stability and, at others, under the pretext of a threat to internal security and peace. The result is a fragile stability that can only be secured by the ability of political power to suppress society's desires for peaceful change of government.

Periodic elections not only reflect the democratic openness of a political system, but also promote a culture of citizenship and good governance. Community forces can change rulers if these do not meet the wishes of the governed by applying the principle of accountability in elections. In addition, «accountability» subjects rulers to the civic authority of voters, i.e. it is a kind of continuous «accountability» in the development of appropriate public policies.

## How does the electoral system affect political stability?

There is global academic consensus that the «electoral system» in use has a direct impact on the political and party system. When the legislature adopts «proportional representation» forelecting representatives of the people to the legislative branch, the primary objective is to represent all segments of society to reflect their popular presence. On the other hand, the adoption of a majoritarian system aims to represent the segment with the popular majority to take over the legislative branch and thus form a one-party government. This is the inverse of proportional representation, which, by nature, often leads to the formation of coalition governments that include a particular group of parties that may sometimes reach compromises between the center-right and center-left. At the party level, the electoral system enhances the chances of a single party to win a majority, as is the case with the UK, which has a «two-party» system. While proportional representation enhances the opportunities of several political parties and some regional and local whereas emerging, as is the case with Italy.

## The nature of the new Lebanese electoral system

More than 80 years after the adoption of majoritarian electoral systems, whereby a single party wins all the seats allocated in the various constituencies, the Lebanese legislature passed a proportional representation system to apply for the coming elections. Lebanon's case over the past ten years demonstrates the importance of choosing the appropriate electoral system, as Parliament's term was extended for more than five years due to the lack of a consensus on an electoral system.

Although the proportional representation, whose results we will experience next spring, involves better «representational justice» than previous systems, justice will



© Aziz Taher

still fall short of the required level. This is the result not of the size and high number of constituencies in relation to the very small size of the country, but rather of the fact that some of these constituencies have been redistricted into several smaller constituencies, we mean the exclusivity of preferential voting at the district (*qadaa*) level, such as the constituencies of Saïda; Jezzine; Tyre-Zahrani; Bint Jbeil-Marjeyoun-Hasbaya-Nabatieh; Chouf-Aley; Kesrouan-Jbeil; Batroun-Koura; Zgharta-Bcharri; and Tripoli-Minieh-Danniyeh. The adoption of the electoral quotient as a threshold for representation is going to be very high, as it will range between 10% and 20% of the number of voters, which means that the forces that do not receive these figures would not be able to enter the Parliament. The threshold of representation is globally under 5% to represent as many political and social orientations as possible. Moreover, the method of adopting the preferential vote, as stipulated by the law, will lead to exacerbating sectarian tensions on the one hand, and to giving local leaders leverage to sway the process in favor of a certain list, on the other. The preferential vote that is used in the open-list system facilitates the formation of political alliances, since it is the voters who determine the ranking order of candidates on the list through their preferential votes. That is in contrast with the closed-list system, whereby a strong party in the coalition determines the order of candidates on its list. Not to mention that retaining the sectarianism of the seats in Parliament, as is the case of Lebanon, coupled with preferential voting, will make

the competition spread within a single list, which will not facilitate the formation of homogenous electoral alliances. Moreover, the electoral law does not generally include electoral reforms that would enhance the presence of young people and women in political life. The «women quota» was not adopted to represent women, nor was the voting age brought down to 18 for youth representation. Consequently, these two social groups remain marginalized in decision-making within the legislative institution.

## How will the Lebanese proportional representation formula affect Lebanese political and social stability?

For the aforementioned reasons, it can be said that the new system has «distorted» proportional representation and brought it closer to majority systems. It can also be said that proportional representation as currently adopted in Lebanon is not in favor of the political forces currently not represented in the legislature. These will be able to enter the Parliament with no more than 10 seats at best. The change that Lebanon's proportional representation brings will be within the political forces currently in power, in the sense of only strengthening the presence of a political party at the expense of another. Given that parliamentary elections are an opportunity for citizens and opposition forces to hold accountable the officials through the ballot, the proportional representation mechanisms in use will not allow these forces to form a broad

national coalition that can capture seats and form parliamentary blocs capable of transferring the «objection» vote from the street into the Parliament. On the contrary, the current electoral alliances have shown that proportional representation, in its «distorted» form, has reinforced «pragmatic» alliances established to win more votes and not electoral alliances between homogeneous forces with alternative political programs.

## Will the Lebanese parliamentary elections strengthen civil peace?

Proportional representation has practically been introduced only to strengthen alternative local leaders from among those who have been at the heart of power in Lebanon's recent history. The power relations and balance have not only been founded on the principle of power-sharing among different religious groups, but these groups were endorsing the local leaders entrenched across the Lebanese territory. Although the «parties» resulting from the era of modernity entered Lebanon early with the formation of the state, they have always remained on the sidelines of the formation of power and the re-formulation of the centers of power within it.

The current election law, which some officials have described as «strange» and which was the outcome of last-minute negotiations, has pleased the large political blocs, on the one hand, and the local leaders, on the other. Thus, the upcoming elections will maintain political power based on the parties of traditional leaders who have derived their strength primarily from local entrenchment and secondly from sectarian entrenchment. The new social forces will remain on the sidelines of the formation of power as they have been in the past, leaving the arena open to traditional forces that could not or did not wish to take the country to the required political and social stability. The current sectarian conflict will carry on, if not be strengthened, as long as current proportional representation does not contribute to the building of cross-sectarian and cross-regional alliances based on party programs.

Given that the permanent civil peace is based on resolving conflicts through state institutions, headed by the executive and legislative branches, it will remain conditional on the current political tug of war.

\*Researcher and journalist specializing in electoral and political affairs

## Case

# No Rest for Refugees in Lebanon, Not Even in Death

Roger Asfar\*

Many stories and problems come to mind when a person, whether Lebanese or Syrian, thinks of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. These perhaps include things relating to job opportunities, basic living costs, renewal of residence permits, and provision of educational, health and medical services to those who need them. These medical services, however, may not always be available, or they may be available but insufficient for some reason. So, ultimately it leads to the inevitable end of all living things that is death.

Presumably the vast majority of refugees have left their country fleeing the persistent threat of death as a result of the ongoing conflict, but they did not usually face there the problem of burying their dead, unless they were confined to a besieged area or under relentless bombardment, preventing them from the «luxury» of burying those who passed away.

Things become different in Lebanon for Syrian refugees. There are different factors that affect how easy or difficult this stage is for the bereaved family. There are four main factors: the geographical area, the security situation, the sectarian affiliation and the economic situation.

The geographical area overlaps with the security situation. Syrians in Lebanon primarily prefer to bury their dead in their hometowns for social and economic reasons. But this path may be blocked before the family of the deceased if their area is inaccessible due to the different forces that control it on the ground or because it is besieged and the theater of military operations.

This leads to having to make a difficult decision: to dispense with the burial of the deceased in their hometown and burying them instead in Lebanon. Thus, the search moves to the specifics of his area of residence, the availability of cemeteries, and the ease of the burial process and all matters related to it.

The influence of the religious and sectarian factor is of importance in the case of deciding to bury the deceased in Lebanon. Matters generally seem more straightforward for Christians and Druze, according to those concerned from both groups, than they are for the Sunni community. The reason is simply the low proportion of Christians and Druze among the refugee population, and the existence of «minority sectarianism» that creates a solidarity and makes things easier for the family of the deceased in their affliction – considered one of the humane events most conducive to solidarity. This sectarianism would not have remained as strong if the numbers of refugees of both groups were higher.

As for the Alawites, whose traditional areas of residence in the coastal regions, Damascus, Homs and its outskirts are all accessible areas. In addition, there is a common belief among the Syrians, which is backed up by witness accounts, that the Alawites enjoy preferential treatment at the Syrian border crossings, and as a result they exclude the option of burying their dead in Lebanon.

In the case of Sunnis, who make up the majority of Syrian refugees, i.e. hundreds

of thousands of refugees and dozens of deaths daily, solidarity and sectarianism can sometimes be beneficial in outlying areas and the fringes. But in a city like Beirut, this situation seems like a nightmare befalling the family, compounding their affliction.

Adnan, a 71-year-old Syrian refugee living in the al-Rehab area south of Beirut, says that he recalls how in his childhood, merchants and shopkeepers in his hometown of Aleppo would come out of their shops as a funeral procession passed by to read al-Fatihah or participate in the funeral of the deceased. He bemoans his present compared to those days, as he had to leave the body of his brother who died of a heart attack in the hospital morgue fridges for four days, until he found an appropriate cemetery for him. «We transferred the body to Tripoli to bury him and we paid the costs of the morgue fridge, which is equivalent to half the cost of the tomb and funeral, which are already exorbitant,» he explains. «What would we have done if weren't able to borrow money? Are we to throw the bodies of our loved ones into the sea?»

It is no surprise that the fourth factor, the economic situation of the family of the deceased, plays a fundamental role across all the other factors. Money makes it easier to transfer the body to Syria and to find a cemetery in different Lebanese regions,

even in the most crowded ones.

«It's become a business,» says Amina, an independent woman from Homs, as she describes herself. She tries sell by the side of the road her bunches of parsley and mint, and radishes and other plants, removing wilted leaves and sprinkling them with water. «Just as the sale of bread, food and medicine never stagnates, neither does the trade in matters of death and the deceased,» she says. «There's no escaping hunger and disease, no escaping death.» She tells a story she heard about the burial of a Syrian refugee in a Bekaa cemetery for free. The following day, the cemetery guard extorted the family of the deceased, claiming that the villagers intervened and expressed their discontent. «Pay up \$1,000 or dig out your son's grave and move his body!»

There is a role and place for honorable and good people, both Syrians and Lebanese, in this story. Some stories are known, but many remain shrouded in silence. Many cemeteries have opened their gates to the Syrians free of charge or for nominal fees, such as the cemetery for strangers in Tripoli, or the one specifically for Syrians in Akkar, and in Saadnayel, the Bekaa Valley, Bechamoun, Daraya and Siblaine. However, not all were able to continue operating, either because they reached maximum capacity or because they were limited exclusively to Syrians living in neighboring

areas. According to the testimony of a Syrian relief activist in the Bekaa, «As soon as news of a free or semi-free cemetery in an area spreads, refugees from all over Lebanon rush to it.» According to him, this explains the extent of the problem and of the demand.

The cost of a tomb in most cases ranges between \$400 and \$3,000, and in special cases for the affluent, it can be several fold higher than \$3,000. According to Sergios Abed, a Catholic priest and monk in Basilian Aleppians Order, the annual fee for a tomb at his monastery's cemetery near Jounieh is \$250. He explains that the renter of the tomb can use it to bury more than one person over time, and that there is a mass gravesite free of charge for those who do not wish to pay the annual tomb fee. A Palestinian activist working in relief for Syrian and Palestinian refugees explains that the cost of a tomb in Siblaine, for example, is just under \$400, and the cost in the suburbs of Beirut ranges between \$1,500 and \$3,000.

In addition to the cost of the tomb, there are also the religious rituals fees associated with funeral, the cost of the coffin or ritual washing, the cost of transporting the body, digging and preparing the grave, and perhaps the costs of the wake, which include renting a space as well as coffee and services. A man who was listening in on Amina's testimony summarizes the situation with his southern accent by subverting an old saying: «The burden of the tomb on top of death, and the burden of paying for the tomb on the family of the deceased.»

Despite the efforts of some benevolent Lebanese and Syrian individuals and groups, those concerned still hear testimonies about secret night burials, cases of blackmail and bribes, and even cases in which the family of the deceased was forced to hand over the body of their son to strangers to bury him in the vicinity of the city of Arsal, without being able to accompany their son to his final resting place.

All of these stories clearly show that individual and civil initiatives and solutions to refugee problems, including the problem of funerals and cemeteries, are not enough. In a sector where the Lebanese have been suffering from problems relating to availability and high costs, even before the Syrian refugee crisis, especially in cities, the required solutions appear to be at the official and government levels, and it is not enough to demand the return of refugees tomorrow whence they came to solve the problems where they are today.



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# The Crisis of Marriage Institution in Lebanon: Between Socio-economic Systems and Personal Status Systems

Ghida Anani\*

**Suad and Selim's wedding ceremony was held in a mountain village, in the presence of the families of the bride and groom, and the villagers. Suad was a 14-year-old eighth grader when she got engaged to Selim, who was twelve years her senior. Less than a year later, she dropped out of school to marry him. When asked whether her marriage was consensual or forced, she said she was consenting. Her main reasons were her desire to get her parents off her back and get away from her large family.**

Suad expected her marriage to be her deliverance, but things did not go her way. She soon started suffering at the hands of Selim who would beat her, humiliate her and abuse her. Four years after their marriage, Selim threatened to take a second wife as she «wouldn't bear him a boy».

Marrying off underage girls is not only acceptable in our society, but also encouraged and blessed by the parents, religion and society. This practice is regulated by a constitutional and legal structure known as the Article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution, which calls for the State's respect for the personal status system «of both parents whatever their religious affiliation». Legally, this means that decisions on marriage and divorce and everything in between are done through and by clerics. The latter decide the minimum age for marriage, and in many cases rely on their own assessment of the girl's maturity and her eligibility for marriage.

Among Christian and Muslim communities, only the Orthodox communities have set the marriageable age at 18 for men and women, albeit in some cases they may reduce that age to 17 for boys and 15 for girls. In theory, The Shiite community considers the minimum age for marriage 15 for young men and 9 for girls, although the main condition is that girls reach puberty even if this happens when they are only 8 years old!

The Lebanese have been living in this situation since the 1930s. In the 1950s, the regulation of this issue began with laws governing personal status matters of the various religious groups. Remarkably, «early marriage» has unexpectedly and only recently become an «issue». The problem has naturally been pinned on others, such as Syrian refugees who, according to public opinion in Lebanon, have become the problem. They marry off their daughters, motivated by their desire to «protect» them or to take the financial burden off their shoulders, given that they find themselves in irregular displacement conditions. And adding insult to injury, they do it without a *zaffa* (a traditional wedding procession)!

When Suad tried to have recourse to the court to get justice, she discovered that this course of action was not that simple. The divorce decision and implementation lie exclusively with the husband. She did not find comfort in her parents either. «This family has no divorcee daughters,» came her father's response after she told him about her wish to separate from Selim.

Marriage in Lebanon is subject to several religious authorities, where the majority



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of marriages are officiated with religious or spiritual legitimacy through their respective courts. They regulate all matters relating to marriage, including inheritance, custody, divorce, alimony, custodianship, guardianship, among others. However, given that religious authorities diverge in their views of these matters, women, depending on their sects, are subject to various provisions that differ from one sect to another, leaving women in Lebanon vulnerable to various forms of discrimination. This is perhaps most evident in matters relating to custody, domestic violence, forced marriage and minimum marriageable age, among other inequalities in social rights.

When did Suad's and Selim's problem start? What left them both in two parallel worlds with different expectations and hopes for the marital institution? In the search for the roots of this problem, we find that it goes back to childhood. Children in Lebanon, as in many other countries, grow up on a path of gender and social ideologicalization, manifested in games, role divisions, and conscious or unconscious forms of identification with those around them in the vital family or social spheres about what society expects of girls and boys in preparation for their «supreme» roles, as determined by society within the context of the marital institution. Thus, girls are

systematically exposed to the role of the mother-wife by the toy, movie and cinema industries and the social environment through dolls, Barbies, kitchen utensils and ironing tools, which all relate to the private sphere. As for boys, their toys and games are predominantly challenging, focusing on physical strength, violence, winning, etc., and are carried out in the public sphere, gradually preparing them to become «men» and husbands as expected of them.

The two sides therefore grow up with different views of the social roles they will have to play, as if they come from two separate worlds. Without a doubt, their visions of their expected roles in marital life have no grounds in reality. In the case of girls and young women, the view is often fanciful and dreamy, and far from reality, as they often dream of a «knight on a white horse». Young boys, on the other hand, have a sense of entitlement and expect their partners to maintain the household and remain within the boundaries of the men's personal space.

Regarding divorce and marital problems, according to An-Nahar daily, the figures and data from religious and spiritual courts in Lebanon indicate that in 2014, Christian and Islamic courts registered 41,717 marriage contracts, while divorce contracts reached 7,180 for all the religious communities in Lebanon in the same year,

indicating that the divorce rate was 17% in 2014.<sup>(1)</sup>

In defining the dynamics of the marital relationship between the two partners, psychology indicates that one plus one is equal to three, in reference to the fact that the dynamics of the marital relationship are determined by the two sides of the relationship and by the sum of attitudes, concepts and expectations borne by them, which determines to a large extent the course, form and status of this dynamic relationship.

Those looking for reasons for divorce or termination of marriage between spouses often come across many opinions by psychologists or clerics about «marital duties and rights» or «virtual relationships» brought by the technological wave. Divorce, however, is not rooted in these trivial reasons. The main reason lies in the fact that marriage is founded on an unequal dynamic relationship between the two sides, which makes it impossible to sustain. When it does live on, it is mainly due to considerations relating to children. This is one of the root causes of divorce, as women are not seen, either religiously or culturally, as citizens with independent decision-making and independent will in the marital institution. Thus, with the increasing rates of separation between spouses, we find that the economic empowerment of women, the shift in their self-awareness and their growing choices have become essential factors in pushing them towards separation. It should be noted that this category of relations may not necessarily belong to any of the religions, whether the marriage contract is civil or religious, separation between spouses is not necessarily classified as a divorce, but as a termination of the marriage contract in which women's decision is fundamental and pivotal.

In the context of the search for ratios and statistics on divorce in Lebanon, we find a report that places part of the responsibility for those high rates on Syrian women refugees. Perhaps the Arabic sayings «my leader can do no wrong» or «it's probably the Italians who did it» apply to Syrians in the case of Lebanon?

Regarding this crisis facing the «marital institution» today, the question remains: How can program and policy-makers deal with the disintegration of values and principles governing choice, decision and mechanisms of managing marital relationships to ensure the building of healthy, non-violent societies that spread the concepts of peace?

(1) An article published in An-Nahar by Jean Sadaka, 2015



## Lebanese Women in Politics: A Road Paved with Bad Intentions

Scarlett Haddad\*

If French poet Louis Aragon was right about women being the future of men, Lebanon's future still looks uncertain. Lebanese women have been increasingly making their presence felt in most fields, but they remain far from being man's equal, especially in politics. Until now, this arena had been reserved for men – or at least for women who have inherited leadership from men, whether their fathers, husbands or brother. The idea of candidate quotas for women was not included in the new electoral law, each party passing the buck to the other. However, a significant number of women are running in the May 6 legislative elections. They are thus breaking a taboo in this field and showing their willingness to fight, even though the campaigns against women are more vicious than those against men, as they are more personal. There are 111 women candidates out of a total of 976. A first that could give the impression that Lebanese society is ready to accept women as men's partners in politics.

However, appearances can be deceiving. On the one hand, Lebanese women benefited this year from a boost from the international community and local NGOs to run in elections. On the other, a high number of women candidates will not necessarily translate into an increased number of women MPs in the new Parliament. The new electoral law is based on a mix of proportional representation and a preferential voting mechanism, which puts women at a disadvantage, being put on party lists only to be sacrificed later on the altar of the new system. Political parties want to modernize their image for local public opinion and international bodies by including (partially) women on their lists, while at the same time granting their preferential votes to their strong candidates, i.e. men. They will then claim that they have done their best, but the electorate was not ready. For its part, civil society is not strong enough to impose women figures.

For women, the road to the Lebanese political arena is still paved with bad intentions.

*\*Journalist and Political Analyst*

## «Under the Skies of Beirut»

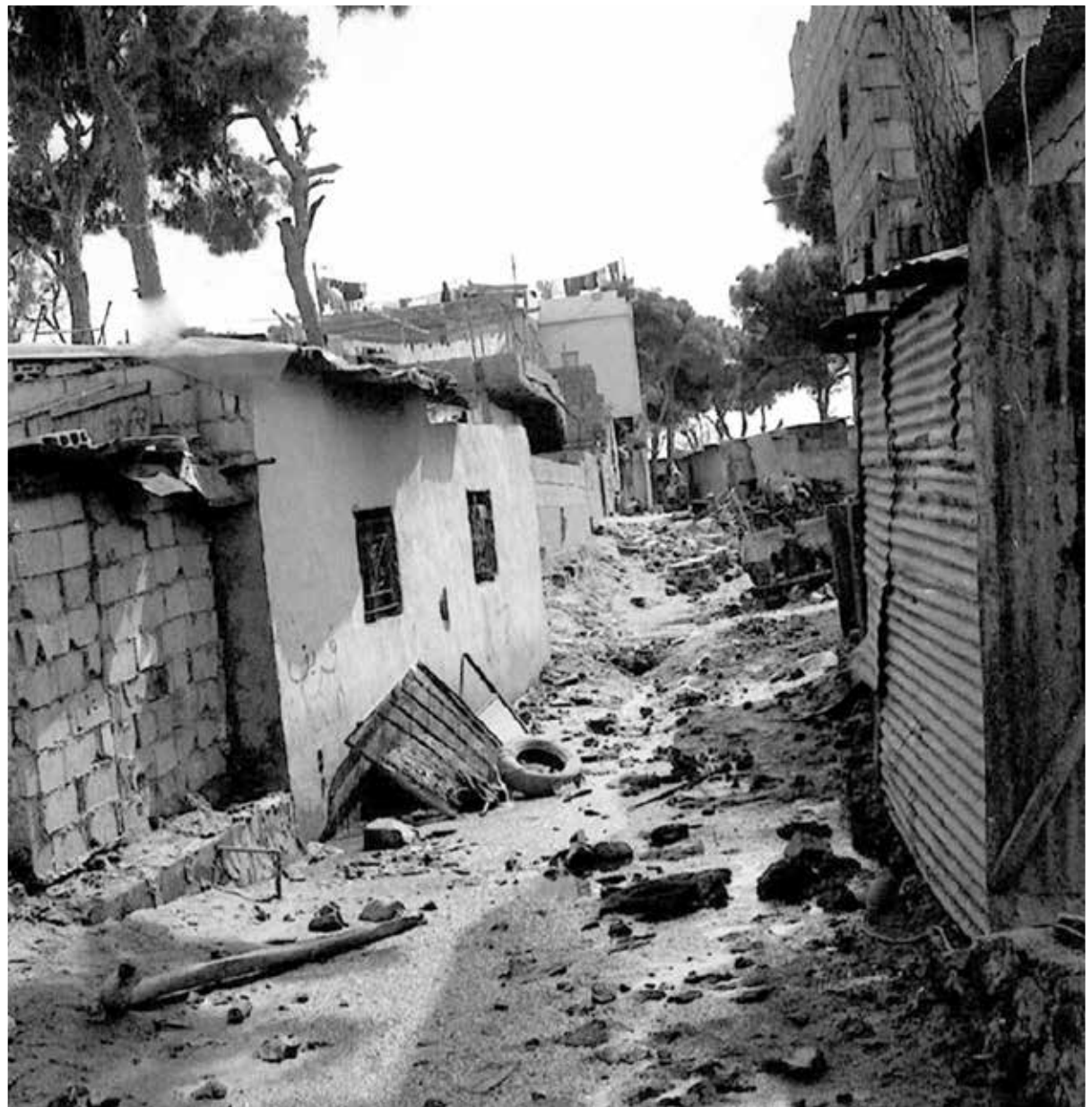


Photo by Aline Manoukian, photographer and picture editor

December 1983, I had just come back to Lebanon after studying in California for 3 years.

I had missed something important, the Israeli invasion of 1982.

I say missed, because I felt guilty about not having shared with my fellow Lebanese one of the hardest episodes of the war.

I went to the Shatila refugee camp, eager to meet the people who had survived the massacre a year before.

I walked in some deserted streets, spoke to people, found some traces of the massacre.

There was a mass grave at the entrance of the camp, some say hundreds, others thousands of victims were and are still buried there.

I met an 8-year-old boy who said he was the only survivor from his family. His tiny corpulence had allowed him to hide in a washing machine while his entire family was being shot to death.

That mass grave hasn't changed today, it's still a flat wasteland. Only a monument in the memory of the dead has been added. In front of it, there are some faded bouquets of flowers wrapped in cellophane, a few murals of black silhouettes on the surrounding walls and a cage with some chicken running around on one side of the «graveyard».

This photograph was taken in one of the narrow alleys of the camp, on the day of my visit in 1983. There are no people in it, only an eerie silence, some scattered objects and perhaps the ghosts of some innocents who ran through those narrow alleys in September 1982, hoping to escape the savagery of their executioners.