The
Peace Building in Lebanon
News Supplement

Issue nº 19, August 2018

german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Implemented by: KFW

UNDP
Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

Special Edition

This supplement is produced by the UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» project and funded by Germany. The Arabic version is distributed with An-Nahar newspaper 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.

© Arsal - Photo by Alia Haju

© Photo by Alia Haju

Priority Objective: Building Trust Between the New Parliament and Citizens

Since 2005, the United Nations in Lebanon has been providing electoral assistance to the government. In 2012, the recent UNDP Lebanese Elections Assistance Project has focused its efforts towards the successful organization of free and fair parliamentary elections.

After five years of delay and three extensions of the mandate of the parliament, parliamentary elections were finally organized on May 6th, 2018. These elections were conducted under a new electoral law, which among other changes, included 15 electoral districts, and a proportional representation system with a preferential vote.

In terms of political participation, the 2018 parliamentary elections were characterized by a relatively low voter turnout of 49.7 percent nationally with «Beirut 1» registering the lowest (33.19 percent) and «Mount Lebanon 1» the highest turnout (67.09 percent). With an estimated number of more than a million voters who are not residing in the country, the turnout remained lower than in previous elections (52 percent in 2009).

For the first time, 82,970 Lebanese voters residing abroad, have casted their votes. Whilst out of country voting has remained modest, this new measure will pave the way for greater participation of registered voters living abroad.

These elections introduced important reforms, including the use of preprinted ballot, to ensure secrecy of voting, as well as out of country voting.

For the past six years, with the support of the European Union and more recently USAID, UNDP Electoral Assistance Project has been providing technical assistance to the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities on the organization of parliamentary elections. It has also supported the Supervisory Commission on Elections on the monitoring of media and campaign financing, as well as the Constitutional Council and the Shura Council on elections disputes.

The project also included the training of thousands of polling officials, the automation of candidates and a list of registration systems, the implementation of an automated result management system, the voters' education campaigns as well as the technical support to women's participation and representation.

Despite an increased level of electoral competitiveness with the total number of candidates jumping to 976, including 113 women candidates, women still, remain under represented. The increase of women candidates from 12 in 2009 to 86 (14.4%) in 2018, was not reflected in the number of seats won by women. The increase of women representation in parliament increased from 4 to 6 seats in 2018. This is a strong evidence that there is still a need to introduce special temporary measures, such as the quota, to increase women representation.

Another area that would require special attention in the years to come, is the safeguard of the rights to vote of people with disabilities, through accessible of polling stations.

Most importantly, the years to come should be an opportunity for the newly elected parliament to build trust with citizens, to ensure increased voters' participation and consolidation of democratic elections.

The UN will continue to support electoral reforms in Lebanon, which is strategically linked to the achievement of the sustainable development goal No. 16 «Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions» as well as to the sustainable development goal No. 5 on achieving Gender equality. Both goals are key to achieve the 2030 development agenda in Lebanon.

The 2018 parliamentary elections were a step forward, and UNDP with the support of its partners, will assess the lessons learned from the 2018 elections, to develop the appropriate and most relevant priority areas of intervention towards achieving electoral reforms, democratic stability and participatory governance in Lebanon.

Philippe Lazzarini
UN Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator
UNDP Resident Representative

Lebanon After the Parliamentary Elections

Following a prolonged political impasse, the Lebanese, both in Lebanon and abroad, cast their votes in May 2018 under a new electoral law. By exercising their right to vote, they voiced their preferences by choosing their representatives. During the electoral campaign, the candidates highlighted important issues in Lebanon, from corruption to bad governance, transportation, pollution and power outages. As noted by Rita Chemaly, one of the writers participating in this supplement, Lebanon remains far behind in the international ranking when it comes to the political participation and candidacy of women: 113 in personal candidacies and 86 candidacies on lists in 2018 compared to 12 candidacies in 2009 and 44 in 2013 when the elections did not take place.

In this supplement, we discuss the importance of further increasing women's participation in electoral and democratic processes, the influence of youth and first-time voters on peace-building and the important role of monitoring in elections. We also shed light on the obstacles encountered by disabled people during the elections.

You will find in this issue inspiring stories of change, perseverance and resilience. The same resilience that Lebanon showed the world by holding parliamentary elections in the midst of regional turmoil, and considerable economic, social and political challenges.

We hope that the newly elected parliament and the incoming government will make a reality the Lebanon all its citizens' dream of: a country of peace, security, prosperity and a clean environment. The elections are widely considered as a chance to bring up change as there was never a more appropriate time to do so.

Dr. Michael Reuss
Deputy Head of Mission
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Beirut

Starting All Over Again

How many years, or even decades, is it going to take Lebanon to find the right path to good governance? Has the country reached a point of no return? Is it condemned to this faltering evolution, in fits and starts, where the rare good courses of progress alternate with bad ones?

There has been no acceptable solution to any one of the many critical problems facing Lebanon today: from the crisis of Syrian refugees to the mishaps that peppered last May's legislative elections and the eternal thorny issues of household waste, the degeneration of public service, the corruption endemic in the political class, the long-awaited structural reforms and the virtual absence of transparency in the exercise of power.

This would make you think that the country's education has to be done all over again to provide instruction in tolerance to counter displays of xenophobia, and even racism; instruction in democracy and respect for the law; instruction in the basic principles of ecology and respect for the environment; instruction in the spirit of public service, which consists of knowing the difference between «serving others» and «self-serving»; and finally instruction in the sacrosanct concept of accountability, so that elected officials, who instinctively believe that they are above the law, are held accountable.

If public opinion in Lebanon is unable to get its voice across, it is simply because elected officials consider themselves untouchable by the very fact that they are almost sure to be re-elected in the next elections, whatever the blunders they may commit during their term of office.

This is a political class that almost in its entirety bands together in brazen complicity and is regularly re-elected amid the generalized lethargy of a population that has nothing but tradition to invoke.

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

A Safe and Stable Life: The «OffreJoie» Model

I was very delighted by the invitation I received from President Elias Hraoui Award Committee, which announces the 2018 award being granted to «OffreJoie» organization. OffreJoie has helped and still contributes to strengthening civil peace in Lebanon. Its activities have also expanded to Iraq where it organized meetings and camps in the regions where people returned to their villages, after being forced by the terrorism of ISIS, in its various types and shapes, out of their houses. «OffreJoie» has endeavored, since the Lebanese civil war, to bypass both geographical crossings between regions and psychological borders between citizens compelled to separate by de facto forces. I remember it once organized a camp in Bekaa for a thousand young boys and girls who came from all regions. The participants had broken into (an organized peaceful access) the then-named border strip area, given it was a Lebanese territory that should not be excluded from their visit to the regions. The participants spent the night at and with the town's families. I spent that night at a Shiite family in Bint Jbeil and received amazing hospitality.

«OffreJoie», the ever active NGO, focuses on reconciling people, first and foremost, particularly in the memory of the Lebanese War. This is what it did in Iraq and it might expand to other countries in a region, steeped in fraternal wars.

This brings me to the suffering of the Syrian refugees, the matter of their safe, voluntary, permanent or temporary return home and other terms that turn them into a commodity among nations and political accounts. To return, for them, is to restore their lands, homes and these rights, accompanied with other due human, social, political, religious and other rights. Then, all the previous statements become meaningless, for we have all experienced war and displacement and we know the value of regaining land and honor.

Ghassan Hajjar
Editor in Chief - An-Nahar newspaper

Democracy

Citizenship as a Doorway to Civil Peace, Security and Social Stability

Ziad Abdel Samad*

Citizenship is the combination of rights and duties in a state of law and the social contract between the state and citizens protecting citizenship. This social contract is based on two pillars: first, the state's commitment in ensuring the full rights of citizens and, second, the guarantee that citizens are fulfilling their duties to the fullest extent.

Political participation is one of the fundamental rights of citizenship exercised to contribute in defining strategic options for holding human rights violators accountable. Yet, it does not mean that citizens should be in agreement on all issues and challenges and on how to address them. Their conflicting interests put them in different positions, which may sometimes be contradictory.

The main challenge lies in managing diversity and differences peacefully, no matter how extreme, without affecting stability and civil peace, and in transforming all forms of diversity into incentives to seek solutions that respond to the interests of different groups.

Community dialogue[1] is one of the best ways of exchanging ideas and opinions. It is a tool for expressing opinions and exchanging views. However, it is governed by principles and factors that should be adhered to if intentions are bona fide and progress is the common goal.

The cornerstone of community dialogue is Democracy that is based on recognizing and respecting opinions in order to find compromises. In this manner, the Parliament – among other institutions – plays a role in maintaining dialogue giving it a legal and institutional dimension, given that it is one of the three branches forming the foundation of the state structure. It functions as a representative of the various social groups with their varied compositions. Also, it is the legislative authority that oversees the executive body, it adopts the state budget as an expression of the national vision, policies and programs of action, and it elects the President of the Republic every six years.

If Parliament's representation of all the components of society is real with its members safeguarding the interests of the groups they represent, dialogue will be conducted within institutions peacefully and will have greater chances of finding solutions. On the other side, if representation is weak, the ability to manage dialogue decreases and the confidence of the citizens is lost. As a result, the citizens lose confidence in the government with the laws failing to protect rights, making it easy to violate them, thus threatening the stability and civil peace.

Since 2005, Lebanon has experienced several occasions that threatened the civil peace due to the negligence of laws and institutions among which is not recognizing the results of elections leading to the disruption of dialogue within institutions.

General elections are held regularly every four years, to elect members of parliament who will take on the responsibilities of the legislative authority during that period, conducting national dialogue on behalf of the groups they represent. The importance of periodic elections aims to affirm the term of the mandate as defined by law in four years, and having elections is a tool to hold MPs accountable for their performance, either by re-electing them or by electing others.

The democracy of elections is measured by international standards that summarize long experiences and practices, for example: fair representation, freedom of choice and integrity in a way that does not affect voter's choices, and independence of the management body.

Based on the above, we present the following observations that affected the democracy of the recent elections in Lebanon.

The impartiality of the organizing body is achieved by either establishing an independent management body that starts its functions as soon as voters' lists are prepared and continues its work until results are announced or appealed, or by forming a neutral government with no ministers running for the elections. However, in the recent elections, the Minister of Interior was a candidate and at the same time was directly responsible for its organization, along with 15 other ministers, headed by the Prime Minister. These ministers campaigned without ceasing to perform their ministerial duties. Although, the Lebanese law requires mayors to resign three months prior to the end date of the Parliament's mandate while the specified period for resignation is six months for first and second-grade employees (with the exception of University professors) and two years for all judges regardless of position to avoid conflicts of interest.

The Electoral Law 44/2017, in which the Parliamentary elections were conducted on May 6, 2018, is based on a proportional representation formula, which is theoretically the best way to achieve fair representation, allowing candidates a share in accordance with their size without excluding any component.

But how was Proportionality stripped of its main components in the last Lebanese Elections?

The Law divides Lebanon into 15 «major constituencies». This criterion for determining the major constituencies varied. For example; in certain cases, governorates were taken to be as the basis (for example; the governorate of Baalbek-Hermel and Akkar), while in others it was districts based (for example; the districts of Zahle, Metn and Baabda). On other occasions, several districts were grouped into one constituency (four districts in North Lebanon 3 and two districts in most of the other constituencies).

In addition, the criteria dividing the major constituencies into minor constituencies also varied. For example, the Baalbek-Hermel governorate remained one major constituency, and two districts were grouped into one minor constituency (Marjayoun and Hasbaya) within the major constituency of South Lebanon 3. In addition, two districts were grouped to form South Lebanon 1 while leaving them as two separate minor constituencies each without any geographical connection between them (Sidon and Jezzine). Some of the districts were deemed major constituencies (Metn and Baabda) and two districts were grouped to form one major constituency (West Bekaa and Rashaya). Also, Beirut was divided into east and west along the same lines of the Lebanese civil war.

The law adopted the single preferential vote applied within minor constituencies, which explains the gerrymandering of minor and major constituencies. So, minor constituencies were grouped into major ones to raise the electoral quotient without affecting the preferential vote and to prevent opposition lists from «infiltrating» the results. The political forces had to join unprincipled alliances to raise the quotient, and accordingly the competition for the preferential vote turned into competition within the same list and even within the same party, confusing voters and complicating the election process. Thus, citizens refrained from participation rather than being motivated by proportionality as a result of what was seen in lists formation and heard during the electoral campaigns.

Another adoption was that of a variable electoral threshold, i.e. the minimum share of the votes required to win a seat. In the South Lebanon 3 constituency, it was as high as 20% (voters turnout was close to 50%), while in Beirut 1 it was approximately 5% (where turnout was about 31%). This disparity in the threshold rate discriminates between the candidates and the representation of citizens, given that 20% for a threshold is very high – almost the highest in the world – preventing change of the status quo.

Further, this Law lacks fair representation in two ways: the distribution of voters across constituencies without any consideration for balance (ranging between 122,000 in South Lebanon 1 and 460,000 in South Lebanon 3), and the distribution of seats across constituencies (ranging between 5 seats in South Lebanon 1 and 13 in Mount Lebanon 3[2]), which creates an imbalance in the representation weight of a single seat. For instance, in South Lebanon 1, it was 24,000, while it was 42,000 in Mount Lebanon 3.

The confessional representation made it all the more difficult to form lists and distribute the preferential votes. Moreover, the absence of a gender quota reflected on women's participation, as there were 113 women candidates, 86 of them were able to make it on the lists, and only 4.6% won (6 women) – another proof of the absence of fairness.

Adding to the remarks, the spending ceiling in some constituencies was as high as 1.7 million USD per candidate[3], making the total spending available in all constituencies and for all candidates about 650 million USD, according to the report of the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA). More importantly, very high prices were set for media coverage and advertising campaigns providing better opportunities for the financially capable candidates... Furthermore, Article 62(2) makes an exception for donations made by candidates and parties for three consecutive years, thus embedding political bribery and turning the Lebanese into nationals of a state that does not respect the rights of its citizens. Several cases were recorded of seats being bought on the lists by those financially competent candidates, which in turn affected fair representation.[4]

The rhetoric used in the electoral campaigns did not adhere to the most basic standards of the Law, such as libel and slander, sectarian and religious incitement, and the use of hate speech and intimidation. Those liable are the candidates who have violated the Electoral Law and the Penal Code, and the media because they did not refrain from publishing these materials given that it violates the Publications Law.

In addition, the election silence was not respected, although by law candidates and their machinery should refrain from carrying on with the election campaign starting from 12:00 AM and until the end of the process. Thus, on the day of elections, the role of the media is limited to covering the electoral process (Article 78). Another clear violation of the Law (article 87) is going beyond the set time for closing the ballot boxes which is 7:00 PM. Article 97, which allows voters on the polling station's premises to vote, subject to being recorded in the report, was used to justify this extension. The Minister of Interior and Municipalities interpreted the «surroundings of the polling stations» as being part of the courtyard, thus allowing those present there to vote. This is an ambiguous formula that confounds the polling station's premises with its surroundings. As a result, the elections went on late into the night in some constituencies, so preliminary results were coming out from the Higher Registration Committees while the voting was processing in some polling stations.

As a result of the incitement to sectarian strife that accompanied the campaigns, two incidents marked the seriousness of the situation. The first took place in a Beirut neighborhood after the announcement of the results by the Higher Registration Committees, when the supporters of some parties rallied and ripped pictures and ads of figures on competing lists using foul language and started small fires, causing turmoil. The fact that officials intervened and arrested them suggests that they had acted under their direction and stopped on orders from them. The second incident was a dispute in the city of Choueifat (Mount Lebanon 4) between two supporters of competing lists of the same religious confession. The fight led to the launch of a firecracker targeting one party's offices and killing one of the staff. One of the winners covered for the criminal, who remains un-arrested, which escalates tensions.

Democracy, fair representation, and free participation are the guarantors of stability and civil peace. The violation of justice, equality and respect for the other, the promotion of hate speech, incitement to strife, and slander and defamation, and giving impunity to those breaking the law are all factors that threaten the civil peace, ultimately leading to more pressure within a society that is marked by diversity, differences and tensions.

* Executive Director, Arab NGO Network for Development

(1) Community dialogue is an advanced version of a three-party social dialogue: the state, businesses and workers. Social dialogue is a mechanism for resolving disputes between workers and businesses under the auspices of a "theoretically" neutral state. When dialogue takes on issues broader than labor relations between workers and businesses, such as identity, governance mechanisms and instruments, or major economic decisions to deal with crises such as unemployment, debt, disability, inflation, tax policy, social protection and unemployment protection, social groups that represent the interests of broader social forces than just workers should be engaged.

(2) From the website of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities created for the 2018 elections www.elections.gov.lb

(3) 5,000 LBP for each voter in major constituencies, 150 million LBP as a lump-sum for each candidate and 150 million LBP for the list on each candidate.

(4) The media reported cases of bribery and vote buying, and the observers from the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) and LTA recorded cases without being able to gather evidence due to difficulties related to obtaining and documenting them accurately.

© Illustration by graphic designer Mona Abi Wardé

The Peace Building in Lebanon news supplement

Issue nº 19, August 2018

Participation

The Implications of the Political Participation of Women in Lebanon, a Culture of Inclusion and Reinforcement of Special Measures: an Imminent Priority for an Effective Role

Rita Chemaly*

The Lebanese Constitution is clear in its Article 7 in which it guarantees equality between men and women without any distinction. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ratified by Lebanon in 1996 encourages in its Article 4 the State to adopt strict measures, more specifically «temporary special measures» aimed at increasing women representation in the bodies whose members are elected or nominated, in all areas of the public life. This is also validated by the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325/2000 on Women, Peace and Security, Resolution 1820/2008 and Resolution 2122/2013 urging the countries to strengthen the presence and participation of women in the negotiation and mediation commissions aiming at ending armed conflicts and establishing civil peace. Recently, the «2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development» has put equality back on the table of the national public policies, with an action plan adopted in September 2015 during the United Nations summit, comprising 17 sustainable development goals, of which Goal 5 is directly linked to gender and equality between men and women.

Some of these texts are binding, others not. But whether binding or not, it is up to the Lebanese State to take measures granting women a vital place in politics. The political and social culture of the country is reflected for that matter by factors such as the social and public role of female citizens. In other words, the place granted to women in politics and in the public domain strengthens the social inclusion as a unifying element of a democracy that is really participative and egalitarian. The withholding of dominant or «leadership» roles in society, particularly in elected and appointed bodies (ministerial portfolios, General Directors, Embassies, Commission, negotiation committee...) shows to which degree the patriarchy pervades the political culture and how the State reinforces the inclusion of all, men and women, in its public spheres, through its policies as well as practices.

Figures, and examples of social exclusion in Lebanon:

In facts, Lebanese women have obtained, following various mobilizations, the reform of the electoral law in 1953, enshrining their political rights. But given the various sectarian and geographic quotas existing in Lebanon, it is hard for Lebanese women to break the circle of male domination in politics. It wasn't before 1963 when a woman was elected without vote at the Parliament to succeed her deceased father. During the 2009 legislative elections, of 587 candidates only 12 were women, and only 4 were elected at the Lebanese Parliament. The May 2018 legislative elections underline a significant improvement of the political participation in terms of candidacy: 113 in personal candidacies, 86 candidacies on lists in 2018, compared to 12 female candidacies in 2009 and 44 in 2013 when the elections did not take place. The results of the 2018 elections express a modest number of 6 elected among 128, despite the proliferation of national awareness campaigns. Lebanon remains far behind in the international ranking.

In the cabinets, the representation of women is scarce; one female minister for the last government and none for the previous one.

Since the 90's, the national dialogue has been initiated and organized by the political authorities such as political parties and government authorities; main leaders to decide civil peace, coordinate defense strategies and ensure the bases for national consensus regarding the burning Lebanese issues. Women are, up to this date, absent from these meetings which aim at deciding national priorities. The national dialogue meetings have established the foundations of the compromise in Lebanon, Taef, Doha or those that took place in Lebanon for the peace negotiations: the issues discussed and the suggested solutions, without the participation of female citizens excluded from these reunions, risk not being suitable for them and being hindered by their lack of completeness and/or being taken seriously by those who did not participate in the meetings. The results of the municipal elections that took place in 2016 have shown a slight progress in the female participation rate in the municipal elections, from 4.6% in 2010 to 5.4% in 2016, with 663 women elected locally. This rate is surely not sufficient for a genuine inclusion of women in decision making at the local level, given all the work women can undertake, particularly in the framework of local reconciliation and mediation processes that did not systematically take place after the war and the various conflicts witnessed in Lebanon.

The role of women in the processes of the truth, reconciliation and reconstruction commissions must be a priority of the national efforts and one of the democracy challenges the country tries to consolidate.

© Illustration by graphic designer Mona Abi Wardé

Several initiatives for a political and social inclusion that transforms structural obstacles

A major social movement supports political and civil rights of women in Lebanon as a main cause. This movement is composed of national authorities, such as the National Commission for Lebanese Women, established by Law 720/1998 and the new Women's Affairs Ministry established in Lebanon in 2017. The movement is also supported by civil authorities, particularly NGOs that were gathered under the guidance of the national coalition «Women for Politics», formed in 2016. The demands were simple, particularly ensuring full social and political rights of the Lebanese women. Even if the establishment of a quota is not the dream solution for the men/women equality, studies have shown however that this system allows women to access public affairs and decision-making positions. The civil society associations have claimed the establishment of a 30% quota system, a transitory and temporary system that might allow increasing the proportion of women in the Lebanese public life, particularly in the parliamentary electoral law. The common vision behind these egalitarian claims, as highlighted by the national women's strategy in Lebanon 2011-2021 consists in a public political sphere without a male domination, where women can also be established citizens with complete rights.

The marginalization and exclusion of women as a result of compromises and concessions, made because of a sectarian and patriarchal system, require patent measures and several action levels: amending electoral laws. The project submitted in 2010 to amend the law for municipal elections with a quota for women must be brought up again. The 2017 law of parliamentary elections reexamined with measures that encourage mandatorily having a number of women on each list, under threats of penalty. Furthermore, ensuring the respect of the equality principle in all ministries, commissions and appointed delegations.

Inclusion and equitable representation, for a full citizenship

In brief, the battle for an effective and complete citizenship is long. Temporary measures allow women, as an entity marginalized by the structure of the system, to access all areas of decision-making, administration and community service. This would ensure a better representation of women, one that would allow addressing gender issues and its various implications on the public life in the public debate, within entities such as the Government and the Parliament.

* Lecturer at the Political Science Institute
Researcher in Political Science and Gender Issues
Blogs at www.ritachemaly.wordpress.com

Youth

Why First-Time Voters Abstained from the First Parliamentary Elections in a Decade

Gino Raidy*

On May 6, 2018, many analysts and commentators following the first parliamentary elections in Lebanon since 2009 found themselves puzzled at the unwillingness of Lebanon's young, first-time voters to show up to the ballot boxes and cast their votes. Some campaigns immediately started to do some soul-searching to figure out why, while others remained in denial and dismissed it as just the carelessness of youth and their preoccupation with matters they find more interesting on a Sunday off, such as going to the beach or camping somewhere, maybe even nursing a hangover from the night before, despite the state-imposed curfew that shut most clubs and pubs down on the eve of the elections.

Weeks after the fateful day, which regenerated almost the same parliament, the reasons so many young Lebanese voters stayed away from the ballot box have become clearer.

The first, and perhaps most potent reason, is a severe lack of trust in Lebanon's institutions. Rampant corruption, an unabashed culture of clientelism and a complete lack of accountability is a reality that 21 to 30-year-olds grew up in. This makes the «Post-War Generation» skeptical of any initiative taken by the Lebanese government, especially elections that might threaten the current status quo. This lack of trust automatically translates into a lack of enthusiasm to participate in Lebanon's political process. «Nothing will change» has been hammered into young minds for decades, and it has successfully kept them away from casting their votes on the first Sunday of May 2018 and participating in political life.

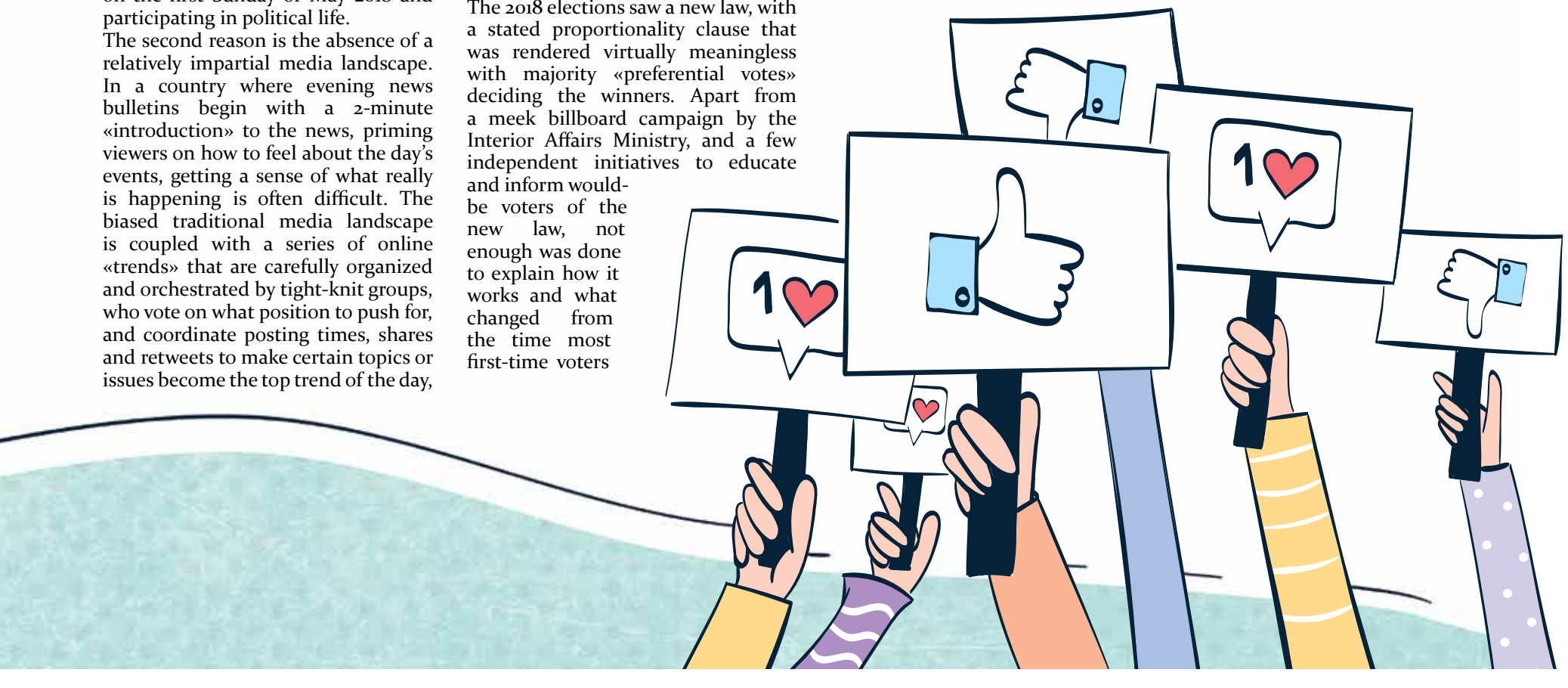
The second reason is the absence of a relatively impartial media landscape. In a country where evening news bulletins begin with a 2-minute «introduction» to the news, priming viewers on how to feel about the day's events, getting a sense of what really is happening is often difficult. The biased traditional media landscape is coupled with a series of online «trends» that are carefully organized and orchestrated by tight-knit groups, who vote on what position to push for, and coordinate posting times, shares and retweets to make certain topics or issues become the top trend of the day, even when the reality on the ground and offline is far from it. This makes misinformation extremely difficult and time-consuming to rectify for the average reader, listener or viewer, and the consensus that TV channels and radio stations are mouthpieces for different groups, makes staying up to speed with what's happening a cumbersome task many of the Post-War Generation no longer bother with. This reality is even reflected in plummeting ad revenue for traditional news organizations, given advertisers want to pay top dollar for the very target audience that no longer watches or trusts the news (21–35 year olds)…

The third and probably most direct reason, is the complexity of the electoral law and the gerrymandering of districts that electrifies politically-affiliated youth, but deflates the hopes of young men and women who do not subscribe to a certain political party. The 2018 elections saw a new law, with a stated proportionality clause that was rendered virtually meaningless with majority «preferential votes» deciding the winners. Apart from a meek billboard campaign by the Interior Affairs Ministry, and a few independent initiatives to educate and inform would-be voters of the new law, not enough was done to explain how it works and what changed from the time most first-time voters were taught about elections in their Civics classes at school.

Gerrymandered districts gave an unfair advantage to political parties in their perceived areas of influence, further eroding young men and women's will and drive to go out and vote knowing that the winners and their shares of the seats have already been pre-determined. Add to the fact that the voters can only cast their ballots in their hometowns, and a large portion of Lebanon's youth has moved away from the more rural parts of the country, the desire to elect representatives of a district they do not live in, did not grow up in and do not see themselves moving back, dwindles.

All of the above, plus many other more subtle factors, have kept young voters away from the ballot boxes. This illustrates a dire need to reform the electoral law, making it more inclusive and more representative. The severe lack of trust is also an uphill battle that needs to be tackled, if Lebanon's young men and women are to start participating more heavily in the political process that affects their daily lives and future livelihoods. If Lebanon hopes for a better turn out of young voters in 2022, vital reforms need to be implemented in order to help maintain and build the peace in Lebanese communities. Peace building by making sure segments like the youth, women and the politically unaffiliated are better represented in the halls of the parliament, the halls that legislative reform Lebanon so desperately needs will arise from.

* Blogger



The Peace Building in Lebanon news supplement

Issue nº 19, August 2018

Inclusion

Disability Is Not a Seasonal Issue

Amal Charif*

I didn't vote. I was carried four floors up. I haven't been to the theater for 20 years. I was told about a doctor's office that was easily accessible. We almost fell down the stairs, the people carrying me and I. I was offered a job but the entrance was inaccessible. I'm not a sack of potatoes. Some of us work in private companies. We work in various fields. Media. Medicine. Education. Research. We are ordinary people just like all the other members of society. There are those who succeed, fail, heroes, slouches... We get married, get divorced, date, do sports...

The progress of societies is determined by the rule of civil justice that upholds the rights of all its members at all levels. Unfortunately, what happened in Lebanon in 2016 during the municipal elections and the recent parliamentary elections was scandalous. The most striking thing for me was the exclusion and marginalization of disabled persons through participation in the elections by disregarding their constitutional right. This happened despite the promises made by the Ministry of the Interior following each election that the following elections would uphold the right of every person to vote in dignity. The most recent of which followed the municipal elections of 2016 when Minister of Interior Nohad Machnouk confirmed his ministry's failure to ensure that disabled persons are able to cast their ballots in dignity and apologized for not being prepared to ensure their access due to lack of time. But we saw the same thing happen in the recent parliamentary elections, the only difference being that the Government and the Ministry of the Interior had just under a year to prepare the logistics.

A month has passed since the parliamentary elections. The media have gone quiet and people have stopped talking about all the organizational failures and the disappointment of disabled voters. The election ended with promises from the Minister of Interior and Prime Minister that things will be better next time. The scandal passed without any accountability. There were just promises of solutions for the next elections that remained suspended in the air.

So why has the State failed so many times to facilitate voting of disabled persons, the elderly and other individuals who have difficulties in accessing polling stations?

The responsibility for failure lies primarily with the Government as a whole and with the relevant ministries: Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of the Interior and Municipalities.

Government institutions flounder at each election although the solutions are easy and sustainable and do not require all this floundering to secure a fundamental right guaranteed by the Constitution. Paragraph (c) of the Preamble to the Lebanese Constitution unambiguously stipulates that «equality in rights and duties among all citizens, without distinction or preference». This is the role of the Ministry of Social Affairs following the adoption of Law 220/2000 for the disabled, which contains detailed provisions to realize the safety, dignity and well-being of disabled persons in their society. The National Council for Disability Affairs (NCDA) was founded as the decision-making authority for the affairs of disabled persons, chaired by the Minister and members consisting of experts and elected representatives of disabled persons. However, implementation of the law has yet to be put into action and some of its clauses require amendments and clarifications.

The real-life implementation of the benefits for disability card holders also revealed that disabled persons are subject to complex bureaucracy in government departments, which do not have the internationally required standards to achieve the independence and equality of disabled persons. Although the law grants the NCDA many powers, it remains, unfortunately, as in the case of the country, full of political tensions and its decisions unimplemented. The Ministry of Social Affairs also lacks a dedicated information center to respond to the questions of holders of the disability card granted by the Ministry and of other members of the community who are concerned with disability issues. Most disabled persons suffer when they benefit from the privileges granted to them and often do not know how to obtain these services. After the adoption of Law 220/2000, the Ministry of Education had to supervise and follow up on its application to ensure that all schools are accessible. After all, children with disabilities are entitled to attend public and private schools and not to be isolated in establishments away from the rest of society. Given that the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities oversees the electoral process, it should have, as soon as the municipal elections ended in 2016, and in line with the promises made by the Minister, take the initiative to form a team of specialists to offer practical solutions. They should have used modern and innovative techniques to devise solutions that preserve and protect the dignity of disabled persons and the elderly and facilitate voting for a category of over 50,000 persons without exposing them to the risks of being carried and avoiding the humiliation they have experienced in previous years.

So why has disability become a seasonal issue after all the momentum it enjoyed in the 1990s and early 2000s? Today, it is almost absent from the State's agenda, negatively affecting the lives of roughly 20 percent of the population, including disabled persons, the elderly and families with small children in strollers. All of them face the same difficulties of lack of adequate infrastructure to facilitate their daily duties.

Despite the available evidence and testimonies of disabled persons about violations and risks faced during the voting process, as well as objections to the absence of logistical procedures to allow all individuals to cast their ballots independently and without the need for any assistance, no disability organization or disabled persons has to date tried to hold accountable the Government and ministries concerned for the violation of their rights or followed up on the implementation of their promises.

I admit that I myself have been slack when it comes to this issue. This issue has not meant much to me despite the fact that I was diagnosed with poliomyelitis at the age of one. I worked for over two years at the NCDI, and then for five years at the Arab Resource Collective. Being a graphic designer, I decided to leave my work for NGOs and pursue my dreams and ambitions of working for a private company to realize myself. I moved between different companies in Beirut, Khobar and Doha, and finally settled in Beirut. What brought me back to this issue was a picture of a minister's car parked in a place reserved for people with special needs. Later, I documented many of these violations and used social media to raise awareness, ask people for help and involve them in the process of documenting violations, mostly parking in places for people with special needs or buildings without ramps. Social media users interacted with me from all around Lebanon and have been sending me pictures of violations since 2007. What these pictures revealed is that majority of those who do not respect or enforce the laws are either ministers, MPs, doctors, security officers or chauffeurs waiting in the car. I have also documented in the pictures violations by representatives of diplomatic missions who also parked their cars in places reserved for people with special needs, ignoring the signs that prohibit parking there, even though these groups are supposed to have more awareness and better apply and respect the Law.

When I ran in the 2016 municipal elections as part of the Beirut Madinaty campaign, my first goal was to shed light on this neglected cause and the focus of my campaign was «the right of access for all».

We are all slack regarding our cause. As organizations and as individuals. We, disabled persons, who work outside the scope of NGOs, have given up on our main cause. We fight on a personal level to ensure an accessible environment that enhances our own independence while ignoring the rest of our peers. This is no longer enough. We are all concerned. We must stand together to ensure enforcement of the laws and put an end to the violations of our rights, primarily by State institutions. Unemployment affects the majority of disabled persons, constituting the highest rates among the Lebanese population. Most disabled person do not have medical coverage, and the disability card is not recognized by medical institutions and covers individuals only when hospitalized. On the one hand, we get services, but, on the other, we are subjected to strict bureaucracy, and don't get answers to many of our inquiries. These details may seem trivial to some but mean a lot to us. Small details that make our lives a hell of suffering.

It is high time for us to come together to formulate a comprehensive plan and move the issue of disability into the 21st century in accordance with our own criteria and conditions that impose solutions that suit us. We are not second-class citizens; we are productive, pay taxes and contribute to the national economy. We are not dependent on anyone. The State and the private sector can benefit from the skills that many disabled persons have to offer.

*Creative Director in Hal Tek

© Illustration by graphic designer Mona Abi Warde

Monitoring

Democratic Elections: Towards Active Participation and Permanent Civil Peace

Omar Kabboul*

The elections are a doorway to state-building, i.e. reinforcing the peaceful paths towards the building and activation of institutions with a view to improving community structures. But there are conditions for them, the most important of which is expending all efforts to consolidate the justice and fairness of representation. In this context, the two terms are often used interchangeably, despite being sufficiently different in terms of the criteria to be taken into account if the real components of the social fabric are to be involved in the process of state-building. Justice in this context requires an electoral system based on a just division of constituencies, where the number of voters does not vary between constituencies in a way that would grossly upset the balance of the value of votes and seats.
On the other hand, elections do not become building tools – rather than tools of demolition – if the adopted electoral system does not allow the representation of all components, each according to its weight and size, i.e. ensuring proper representation without shortchanging.

We in Lebanon are still in the early stages of developing our electoral system, which is often subject to a political tug of war. As has been the case since the dawn of history, the electoral system is often the result of the balance of power in societies. If we look at the current law in Lebanon, which is based on proportional representation with one preferential vote in minor constituencies, anyone can make out the extent to which the current law, in most of its articles, departs from achieving fairness and justice of representation, as presupposed by the democratic process. Since the 1990s, civil society organizations have sought to correct the imbalance caused by the mobilization of electoral laws to suit the interests of the strongest. The Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) has focused on modernizing the legal framework underpinning the electoral process by promoting international best standards and practices in this field, i.e. those that ensure equality among all citizens, equal opportunities for candidates and the right of all to see their representatives elected to parliament without any pressure or intimidation, whether physical or psychological.

With the growth of LADE's role starting with the 1996 elections and following elections, including the campaign My Country, My Town, My Municipality (Arabic; Baladi, Baldati, Baladiyati) that demanded the holding of municipal elections after several years of deferrals, and the parliamentary and municipal elections that came in succession, it became clear to LADE's activists how urgent it was to launch an internal workshop to reexamine the role to be played by the association. This included not only technical observation of the election process, but also engaging in the democratic process in terms of reaffirming the principle of regularity, integrity and adherence to elections as a prerequisite for ensuring civil peace, in addition to establishing the election process as an effective and peaceful accountability mechanism that would prevent unrest and violence.

The election monitoring process in all its forms and LADE's engagement in the national democratic struggle seeking to build a state of institutions have always been in tandem. This stems from the firm conviction that democratic elections are the cornerstone of democracy. But this cannot happen without understanding and exercising this as a tool of freedom, equality and justice. Based on this, democratic awareness of the issues of marginalized groups has always been an essential part of what makes the outcomes of the monitoring process, as well as monitoring itself, a means for maintaining the health of the democratic system, strengthening civil peace and ensuring peaceful political turnover. That is, monitoring the integrity of the process and the extent to which a more just electoral competition is available to all groups, free of irregularities, with all competitors, no matter how uneven their capabilities, on an equal footing before the law and equal in rights.

LADE, in its monitoring of the electoral process, relies on its analysis of the local legal framework and standards, which are often developed as a measure of the integrity of the electoral process and its commitment to international standards. In the run-up to the elections, it primarily seeks to launch a broad election education campaign with multiple objectives. It uses such campaigns to explain the criteria of monitoring as they relate to democracy, integrity and transparency of the electoral process and in terms of their direct contribution to the development of a shared sense of citizenship and law-abidance among citizens. This stems from a firm belief that spreading awareness of political and civil rights among the segments of the Lebanese society will raise the level of political awareness of what is good citizenship and of the rights, duties and reciprocal relations between the institutions of the State and the people. On the other hand, in addition to its mission of promoting electoral awareness, the association contributes to the development and maintenance of a sense of volunteerism among Lebanese youth by explaining the importance of political participation in public affairs through available initiatives and by contributing to the strengthening of electoral frameworks through participation in the monitoring process. The development of this sense of working for the public good also puts young people in direct contact with the political process through its most significant feature, i.e. elections, whether local or public. No power is valid if it does not arise from a free choice within the framework of an electoral system that guarantees all citizens the right to political participation and the choosing of their representatives through the right vote, thus allowing citizens to renew public life by holding the elected authority accountable for the results of the mandate granted to it. This achieves an initial condition for political turnover, creating an atmosphere of political stability that provides the best possible conditions for economic, political and social development(1), and lays the groundwork for establishing sustainable peace.

The monitoring process, which is divided into three stages, begins with the process of revising voter lists and launching candidacy application; involves monitoring electoral campaigns and any violations that may occur and monitoring the electoral day, and ends with announcing the outcome and following up on any challenges. The presence of a highly credible party enjoying the endorsement of all candidates places a weighty responsibility on monitoring bodies, as they become the primary reference for providing all sides with their assessment of the electoral process, pointing out and verifying irregularities without leaving any doubts in the minds of the candidates as to the outputs of the monitoring process. They thus prevent any potential dispute between candidates from turning into to a conflict outside the concerned institutions, or the institutional paths available, as they attempt to prove the validity of their stories out of personal interest rather than the public good.

Based on the above, active and effective monitoring of the electoral process involves raising electoral awareness among all groups, and not just pointing out to irregularities, and constantly seeking to build on experiences to develop the legal framework and adapt it to political and technical developments to promote true democracy. In the electoral field, true democracy is the freedom to choose and equality among voters and among candidates – i.e. the value of votes and seats – and the application of law and adherence to international standards as regulatory frameworks. All of this is the groundwork for consolidating the principle of resorting to institutions to manage differences and competition, at lower cost and greater potential to advance the economic, political and social situation.

(1) Youth Expectations, Fourth National Conference, December 2013

* Executive Director
Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections

The Peace Building in Lebanon news supplement

Issue nº 19, August 2018

Arsal

After Returning to Its Country, Arsal Demands Clearing Its Juroud of Mines

Saada Allaw*

Before Arsal or its inhabitants, the Lebanese Army checkpoint at Ras al-Sarj, the entrance to Arsal, is a herald of the changes in the town nine months following the liberation of Juroud Arsal from armed fighters. In fact, Arsal itself was liberated after paying a heavy price for six years since the outbreak of war in Syria.

The Lebanese Army checkpoints in the town are now similar to any other checkpoints outside of it. Soldiers have taken off the load of heavy armor and helmets and concern and caution in dealing with those arriving and passing cars are now gone. You no longer need an authorization or a friend there to visit Arsal. It is enough to drive there and visit without the fear experienced in previous years by those who managed to enter the town.

Military positions have also eased, having resembled barracks in their positioning around Arsal and its borders with the rest of the North Bekaa towns. For five years, the State had girdled Arsal with about 5,000 soldiers to protect it and its neighbors stretching from Labwa to Hermel, and passing through Fakiha, Ras Baalbek and Qaa.

Soldiers moving individually through Arsal's streets and alleys has become a natural sight too. And then Arsal's inhabitants are happy with the positions and patrols of the Army around their barren mountainous areas and on the peaks of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains range on the border with the Syrian Qalamun. These areas were previously occupied by armed ISIS and Nusra fighters and was forbidden to farmers from Arsal prior to the battle of The Dawn of the Juroud, which returned the land to its owners. All this points to Arsal being returned to the State in the full sense of the word. And yet...

A large lump in the throat mars the peace of this security breakthrough that has pleased the Syrians as much as the people of Arsal: the mines planted by ISIS and al-Nusra in a large part of Arsal lands before the liberation of the Juroud. Mines, which have until recently claimed the lives of 13 servicemen in the Lebanese army, farmers from Arsal and Syrians, in addition to seven wounded, including those left disabled by the amputation of a limb or impairment of its function. The army documented only five casualties.

The contaminated area is 120 square kilometers and constitutes about 30 percent of the area of Juroud Arsal and the lands of its farmers, according to the Lebanese Army, whose sources confirmed that minesweeping will begin in July to be followed after three months by mine clearance

The contaminated area is 120 square kilometers and constitutes about 30 percent of the area of Juroud Arsal and the lands of its farmers, according to the Lebanese Army, whose sources confirmed that minesweeping will begin in July to be followed after three months by mine clearance.

Arsal itself changed after the end of August 2017. Along with the convoys of armed fighters who were evacuated from the Juroud, about 10,000 Syrian refugees

© Photo by Alia Haju

left the town. These were preceded by thousands more, even if in succession, and then they were also followed by individual families. This brought down the number of Syrian refugees in Arsal from about 120,000 to 60,000, including about 40,000 registered with the UNHCR.
The streets of Arsal have also changed. The cars with tinted glass disappeared, along with the pick-up vehicles that used to go about without registration plates. The armed fighters have left the streets forever. Motorbike traffic, which crowded alleys and roads, has dropped, and along with it clashes between passersby on the roads and between houses. Only the closely packed, door-to-door shops remain open. Most of these shops were opened by Syrians (about 500 shops), while other Syrians work in the shops owned by inhabitants of Arsal (about 150 shops).
The crossings between the town of Arsal and Juroud also betray positive change. After the battle of August 2014, the movement between Arsal and Juroud had stopped. The inhabitants of Arsal could not get to their lands, not even to the lowlands of Juroud (al-Wati), which is irrigated land for the most part. This has led to the drying of tree root mass, so gone were the summer and winter harvests, according to Abu Rabih al-Baridi, the only farmer from Arsal who did not leave his land during the years of crisis.
Juroud itself no longer requires a security clearance to get through the Army checkpoints that are still set up at the entrance to Arsal town. It is enough to say that you are going to visit so and so in the «wilderness», as the inhabitants of Arsal refer to Juroud. The soldier asks for your ID and records your car on a special logbook, and lets you go your way.
Abu Rabih expressed the relief of the farmers after the easing of the security measures and the deployment of the Army in all of Juroud Arsal, all the way to the Syrian border. «Juroud has returned to the State and the people of Arsal,» says Abu Rabih.
Bassel al-Hujairi, the mayor of Arsal, describes the situation as «very good», confirming that there is a sense of «a direct security improvement, just because of the liberation of Juroud along with the town of Arsal». «There has been an end sight of arms and illegal cars on the streets, and all manifestations of disruptions to peace and order and of breaking the law.»
Al-Hujairi adds: «This is consistent with the will of the people of Arsal who have long demanded the presence of the State, the Army and all the security forces with all their services in the town, and this was achieved thanks to the cooperation and determination of the inhabitants.» He confirmed that the State is building a police station, which is almost ready, in the place of the station that was occupied by the armed fighters the day the battle started in August.


© Photo by Alia Haju

The streets of Arsal have also changed. The cars with tinted glass disappeared, along with the pick-up vehicles that used to go about without registration plates. The armed fighters have left the streets forever. Motorbike traffic, which crowded alleys and roads, has dropped, and along with it clashes between passersby on the roads and between houses. Only the closely packed, door-to-door shops remain open

The main problem that remains on the minds of the people of Arsal today, according to al-Hujairi, «is the mines and the lives lost to them». He called on the relevant State authorities and the Army to speed up the sweeping and clearance process «to return the livelihoods to the people and to put an end to death».
The joy of the people of Arsal was not complete because of the heavy burdens they have accumulated in recent years. «We lost our harvests in Juroud for five years, the quarries and the stone cutting work stopped, along with work in the transport sector, and there were no jobs, and this is something the people of Arsal were not used to,» says Khaled Al-Baridi. Indeed, Arsal was the economic engine of North Bekaa. Its inhabitants had turned its barren hills into an oasis by planting about 4.75 million cherry, apricot and apple trees. The produce and harvests of the lowlands of Juroud were a major part of the agricultural sector.
According to al-Baridi, the quarries and stone cutting factories, along with about 200 vehicles for the transport of stone from Arsal across Lebanon, constituted a main source of livelihood that was as important and financially rewarding as agriculture, maybe even more so. In addition, trade on the border with Syria in the countryside of Qusayr, Homs and Badia al-Sham in the eastern range also created jobs for quite a number of inhabitants.
The State's compensations for the loss of income by the inhabitants of Arsal, which it estimated at LBP 50 billion, was limited to LBP 10 billion disbursed last year. They do not avail against hunger. Abu Ahmed al-Fulaiti, a Juroud farmer, said he paid about USD 30,000 to revive his farm after he returned to find his farmhouse destroyed and his machinery pillaged. Even the fruit trees which he had cultivated for ten years and only made use of two harvests from, dried up because of lack of irrigation throughout the occupation of Juroud.
The Mayor also mentioned that farmers are unable to access large tracts of their lands. «Our lands have returned to us, but not all the lands because of mines.» He confirms that 150,000 fruit trees have dried out in Juroud, at the lowest estimate, and «we have 120 farmhouses completely destroyed». The armed fighters also felled the trees for use as heating in winter.
The battle in Arsal today is a «developmental» one, according to al-Hujairi. «There is a need to improve the infrastructure that serves the people of Arsal and about 50 to 60,000 refugees.» The mayor says that the roads are not suitable for traffic, the electricity grid requires maintenance and strengthening, as does the water supply network. And most importantly, there needs to be an initiative to solve the growing sanitation problem in the camps, which also affects the groundwater with 120 camps in the town.»

The Peace Building in Lebanon news supplement

Issue nº 19, August 2018

© Photo by Alia Haju

Al-Hujairi also brings up the situation of schools that have been operating on a double-shift basis since 2011 to accommodate Arsal students and refugees. «The equipment, seats, buildings and everything else has worn out because of the large numbers and the operation in the morning and afternoon.»

Coming out of a siege and a crisis cannot happen with just words and hoping, says al-Baridi, adding that the State has to reach out to Arsal for this to be a real and complete return. «The majority of the quarries and cutting factories have been destroyed and their vehicles were stolen, and the people of Arsal cannot resume their work without compensation,» he says.

Al-Hujairi points out to the great challenge facing the return of the stone from Arsal to the market with the same vigor as before. «There is great competition from Egyptian and Syrian stone, and the inhabitants of Arsal need time before they take back their share of the market.»

The relief relating to security witnessed by Arsal also reflected on the Syrians. Abu Ahmad al-Qari says that the presence of the armed fighters was as harmful for them as for the people of Arsal, and perhaps more harmful, recalling the many assassinations carried out by ISIS and al-Nusra fighters of Syrian refugees for flimsy reasons. «We were relieved with their departure, since Arsal was also relieved and we no longer felt that we were accused of any security incidents.»

How a Mine Changes the Life of a Family

Yusuf al-Hujairi had missed his land, just like the rest of Arsal's farmers. With the liberation of Juroud, al-Hujairi (Abu Ahmad) went to his grove in the al-Majar area in Juroud. Fattoum (Umm Ahmad), his wife, sat next to him in the passenger seat. In the back seat sat four of his grandchildren and his unmarried daughter.

As soon as Abu Ahmad arrived at his grove, he stopped his pick-up and asked his grandchildren and daughter to get off and start picking cherries. «You pick the cherries while I park the pick-up in the back,» he told them and drove off with Umm Ahmad.

Today Fattoum al-Hujairi says that she only remembers the sound of a powerful explosion. Then she came out of her coma to find herself hurled about ten meters from the house. Only the cries of her daughter and grandchildren could be heard. The mine killed Abu Ahmad immediately, hurling her and leaving her with two spinal fractures. The mine left her with burns in her face and eyes. Umm Ahmad began crawling a little and tried to walk a little to reach her daughter, who was wailing over her father and mother. «Nothing is left of my mother but small shivers,» said the girl to those who rushed to their aid. She had not seen her mother yet, who was blown away by the explosion.

With the death of Abu Ahmad by a landmine left by the armed fighters in Juroud, and the inability of Umm Ahmad to work, her son Khaled (18) left his studies and started working to support the family.

Umm Ahmad says that Khaled works day and night to cover her treatment. «I do not have coverage from the Ministry of Health, they did not even recognize the Ministry of Social Affairs card.» The woman, who choked on every word she was uttering, had already lost two sons. The first one died in a car crash and the second from a heart attack. «I had not married them off yet and not experienced that joy.»

The mine explosion left her with hypertension, chronic headaches and many scars on her face. «We demand that the State turns to us. We want to clear our Juroud of mines. I do not want to lose Khaled too.»

* Journalist and researcher

Livelihood

Earning Livelihood: When Needs Face Fears

House of Peace Team*

One of the most discussed topics during the Social Peace workshops delivered by House of Peace, is the issue of livelihood(1). Many stories shared by participants coming from different backgrounds highlighted the weight of livelihood as one prominent cause of conflict and tension among refugees and their host communities.

The discussions and analyses around those shared stories mainly showed how livelihood issues affected –mostly negatively– the perceptions these communities have of one another.

The stories speak generally about «competition» over job opportunities. They reflect a feeling of injustice and exploitation among refugees, and one of anger, resentment and deprivation among host communities.

Beside the general impressions expressed throughout the workshops, grassroots narratives highlighted **specific incidents of conflicts** that arose on the subject of livelihood issues; incidents that had taken place between employees and employers, employees themselves and partners.

In some stories, incidents escalated and involved several individuals or groups. This doesn't mean that there were no positive stories or experiences relating to livelihood issues. However, the general negative perceptions cannot be masked by citing some positive experiences.

Generally, the ways in which these stories were presented and discussed divide those who are mainly affected by the whole refugee crisis –i.e. refugees and host communities– into two adversary teams, rather than one team of victims facing the same system/situation. It reinforces the «competition» mind-set and leaves us with an «either-or» fallacy.

House of Peace's newly published paper «Earning Livelihood: When Needs Face Fears» aimed at showing how people perceive this problem. At the same time, it presented the findings in a way that helps rise above the «Us vs Them» mentality and try to identify the main needs and fears of the people most affected by the refugees crisis in Lebanon.

In general, the livelihood problem, as illustrated by most participants, is that Syrian labours are taking over the jobs of the Lebanese in professions they occupy, or competing with them over the market and eventually affecting their income.

From one side, Syrians believe that Lebanese employers exploit them, as they have no rights and no means to protect themselves, and they blame the government for depriving them of the residency papers.

On the other side, Lebanese people who have lost their jobs entirely for Syrians, or whose income has dropped, blame Syrians primarily for that, and the government for not protecting their rights, or creating new job opportunities.

During the discussions that took place at the Social Peace workshops, participants attributed this ostensible «competition» to several reasons:

- The sharp rise in the numbers of Syrian labours in Lebanon.
- Syrians accepting lower salaries than Lebanese.
- The greediness of employers.
- High competence of Syrians in some handicraft occupations.

As previously mentioned, these insights were reached through storytelling and conflict analyses conducted by all participants. Most stories reflected Syrian perspectives as the majority of participants were refugees. However, stories form host communities were also heard. For instance, there was a story of a man who used to sell bread in one area. He had a fight with a refugee who came to sell bread in the same area, forcing locals to intervene. Roundtable discussions also brought more host community insights, which compensated for the modest representation during the workshops.

Collected stories were classified into 5 categories:

1. Compensation: stories about refugees not being paid for services they have provided. In all stories, refugees who were denied their rights couldn't secure them back at a later time. And in some cases, those who demanded their compensations were assaulted by their employers and most of the assaults were not reported.
2. Child labour: many participants mentioned there has been an increase of child labour in Lebanon, especially among refugee communities. Related conflicts were mainly due to child abuse, resulting in an increase in tension between different families and job owners.
3. Noxious work conditions: these conflicts were in relation to refugees who were denied their basic rights at work, such as compensation for work-related injuries, access to restrooms and lunch breaks.
4. High vulnerability: stories that fell under this category highlighted incidents where refugee workers were abused or discriminated against because they represented the weakest actor. Stories were told about innocent people being accused of stealing, were forced to apologize even when they were not wrongdoers, or were threatened to accept unfair treatment because their employers are their residency sponsors.
5. Failed partnerships: As with any business partnership in a normal setting, it is very important to have a comprehensive partnership agreement. This unfortunately is not the case when it comes to partnerships between refugees and host community members in Lebanon, as Syrians are not allowed to establish businesses, resulting in many conflicts between former partners.

As mentioned earlier, the aforementioned collected stories demonstrate the issue of livelihood as a mere problem between refugees and their host communities. However, by further analysing these stories, common needs and fears were identified.

Common Needs	Common Fears
Enhancing living conditions and maintaining a source of income	The protracted refugee crisis
Investing in the capacities of refugees to help both refugees and host communities	Fear of unsafe or unattainable return of refugees
Applying principles and ethics for work conduct	Labor is greater than the demand
Applying fair labor laws & effective judiciary system	Mobs that monopolize certain areas
Applying laws that inhibit child labor or at least protect children who work	Child abuse and forced child labor
Pushing business owners to handle responsibility in case of emergency	Losing jobs or being replaced
Encouraging municipalities to regulate Syrian businesses under fair terms and conditions	Not being paid labor fees
	Fear of the increased needs with time

Taking into consideration these needs and fears when approaching the livelihood issue might help in shifting the predominant perceptions towards more humane, understanding and realistic ones.

Both Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities are suffering from the effects of the refugee crisis. They are increasingly losing the ability to live in dignity or maintain sufficient access to livelihoods. The so-called competition is in reality nothing but exploitation, by the system, of the people most affected by the refugee crisis.

* Social peacebuilding organisation based in Lebanon

(1) House of Peace is a social peacebuilding organisation based in Lebanon. The Social Peace workshop is delivered to participants coming from both refugee and host communities, in order to support them to develop community-based initiatives aiming at establishing spaces for dialogue between them.

The Peace Building in Lebanon news supplement

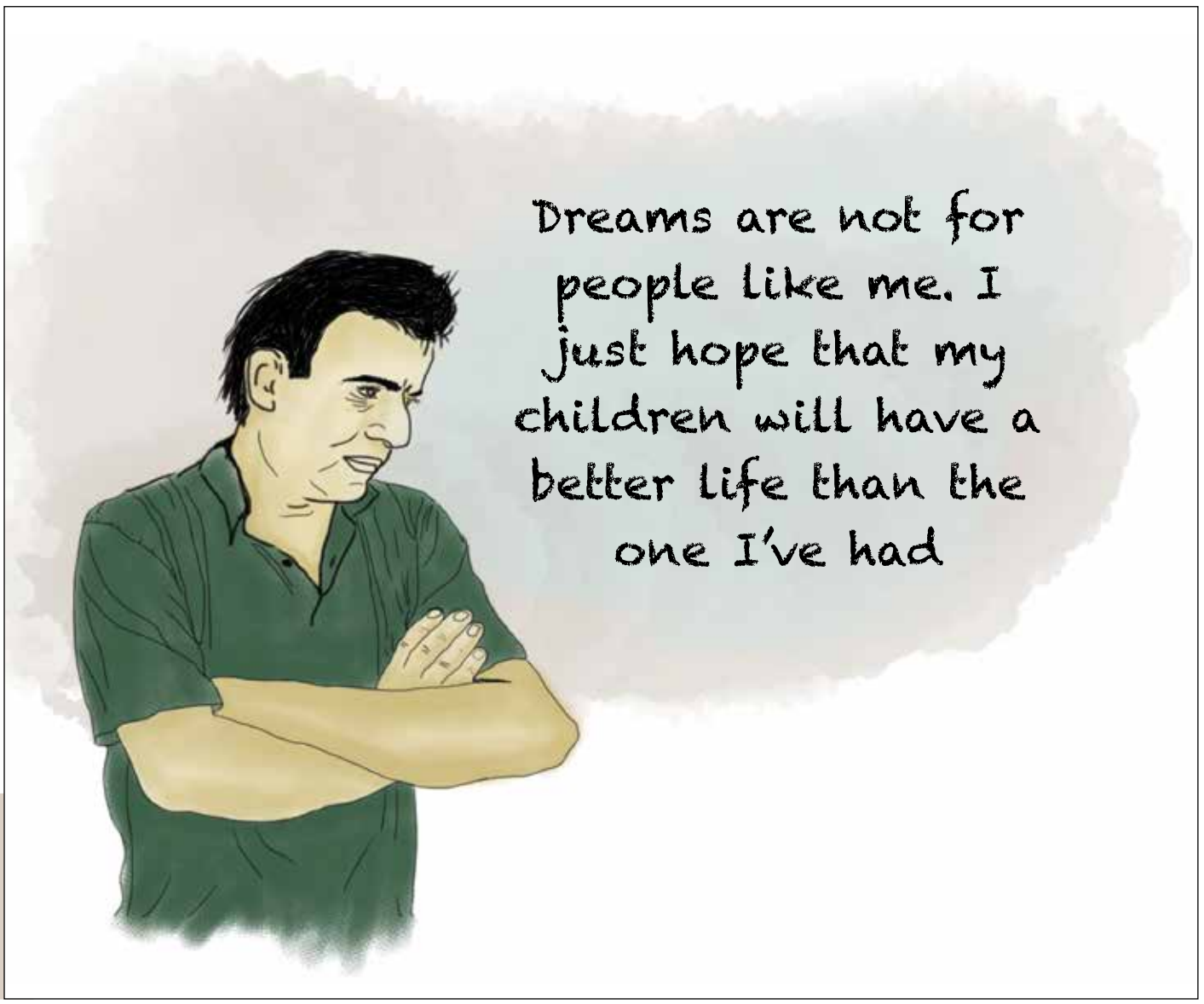
Issue nº 19, August 2018

Rights

Out of the Shadows: Migrants and Refugees in Lebanon

Roula Hamati*

I first encountered Omar in the summer of 2016. He was a shy, soft-spoken 9-year-old with dreamy eyes and a piercing gaze. Omar had been working in the restaurant of one of Bekaa's summer resorts for the past year. His job was fairly simple: delivering food to the restaurant's clients. This, however, was a demanding job for a boy of his small stature and fragile build. Weekends were a particularly busy time at the resort. So a few months into his new job, Omar was asked to work on a Sunday–his only day off. Omar felt that he had no choice but to accept and soon he was working seven days a week, eight hours a day. When he finally mustered the courage to ask for a raise, he was told with a threatening tone: «You should be grateful that you have a job at all!»



© Illustration by Hassan Youssef

Omar's family fled war-torn Aleppo in 2014. The family took refuge in a small tent that they rented in one of Bekaa's refugee camps. His father, Waleed, a carpenter by profession, struggled to find work in Lebanon. Within a few months of arriving in Lebanon, all their savings were depleted and they were facing an uncertain future. Omar has one dream only: to go back to school and return to his room and play with the toys he abandoned when he left Aleppo. His father, on the other hand, says that life has taught him a precious lesson. «Dreams are not for people like me. I just hope that my children will have a better life than the one I've had.»

Millions of migrants and refugees who call this small country their temporary home live in a state of heightened vulnerability. Their journey is one of indefinite waiting. Decades of failure to develop proactive policies to address the root causes of poverty and inequality in society has created and sustained an underclass of easily exploitable migrants. Denied many basic rights, they are essential to maintaining the status quo, yet disposable and easily replaceable. The laissez-faire governance model, a feature of Lebanese public policy, was adopted long before the most recent influx of refugees from neighboring Syria. One of the earlier manifestations of this policy model can be seen through the State's continued refusal to proactively regulate, through legislation and policy, the domestic workers sector, with rampant abuses afflicting it for many decades.

More recently, the loss of legal status or documentation, a phenomenon on the rise because of tightening restrictions on residence permit requirements for different categories of foreigners in Lebanon has become one of the primary reasons for reported increases in labor exploitation and of indecent working conditions. It is also one of the main reasons behind the increase in child labor, as children are less likely to be arrested and inspected for documentation. And whilst these kinds of exploitation mainly affect migrants and refugees, they have also created conditions facilitating the exploitation of Lebanese workers. Wage dumping and indecent working conditions have in fact resulted in lowering labor standards for the Lebanese as well as foreign workers.

In its modern history, Lebanon has witnessed large waves of emigration. And whilst the experience of Lebanese emigrants has taught us many valuable lessons, it has failed to reinforce the idea of the State's responsibility to protect its own citizens. To the contrary, emigration continues to be perceived as the natural solution to many of the problems facing us today.

The public in Lebanon is fearful of any attempt to address the grievances of migrants and refugees through fair and humane policies. This has largely been the result of scare tactics that politicians employ, scapegoating migrants and blaming them for their failures and for the country's deeper structural problems.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, this is not a zero-sum game. While there are tremendous pressures and challenges facing Lebanon today, protecting migrants and refugees should not be one of them. Everyone stands to benefit from bringing migrants and refugees out of the shadows and ensuring decent living and working conditions. When migrants and refugees are integrated into society, when all children have access to education, when healthcare is no longer a dream, when documentation is not an obstacle to work and when we can all work in safety and dignity, we collectively build a better society, one that is more peaceful, tolerant and just. Only then can we start to address the underlying causes of inequality. And while migrants and refugees may be here temporarily, their journey will no longer have to be a journey of indefinite waiting.

*Insan Association

Initiative

Common Spaces: A Space for Everyone

Maysan Nasser*

Over the past few years, there has been a slow and steady increase in common spaces in Lebanon. These common spaces are, in essence, cultural events that are aimed at providing a space for collective self-expression. Their importance and value are ever increasing in an environment that is bombarding individuals with countless daily struggles and tensions. So then, what are these common spaces in Lebanon and how does their cathartic importance present itself?

© Bob Mattar of the Sidewalk Beirut Team

Many collectives in Lebanon have made notable and impressive efforts in providing a common space, such as Cliffhangers, The Poetry Pot, Sukoon Magazine, Fade In, and most recently Sidewalk Beirut open mic, which I founded about a year ago. I was worried that the concept of a weekly open mic wouldn't succeed, yet I was positively surprised that only a few weeks into it, Sidewalk Beirut was attracting many enthusiastic individuals, who curate a supportive and kind environment that ensures and protects the «safe» aspect of this common space. Indeed, more and more people flock to such events, with notebooks or instruments in hand, excited to share their stories. These common spaces allow people to tackle important political and social issues through their own personal narratives.

Michelle, 22, recent AUB graduate and a regular at Sidewalk Beirut, described these common spaces as: «Unique and inviting. They are necessary if you need a break – they can easily become a place where no one questions you. No stigma comes along with them.» She shared her personal experience of these spaces, saying: «There are two poems I've heard that I think I'll never forget, both triggered by rape and abuse, and I think just having that outlet and support is a huge leap in the healing process.»

Claire Wilson, 26, MA student at Boston University, has led her own common spaces in Amman and Boston. She was glad to find an abundance of common spaces in Beirut upon her recent move to the city. «As a newcomer to Beirut, these common spaces are a way for me to immediately connect with storytellers, poets, musicians, artists and other like-minded people who bring presence into listening and expressing. They are a sliver of time composed of the rare combination of human connection, struggle, vulnerability and love.» She talked about the innate value found in such common spaces and said: «Open mics heal. Because music heals, words heal, stories heal, community heals.» She went on to add, «The stage builds confidence in the self and provides a platform for exchanging experiences of pain and resilience, all the while strengthening community. Everyone can self-prescribe their own remedy for what they share and what they are ready to absorb.» She noted that such common spaces become places where youth redefine their values and stances: «In a very real and tangible way, these spaces ask this generation to wrestle with the contradictions of our yearned freedoms.»

Akil Iskandar, 31, interior designer and frequenter of these common spaces, noted that any social or political differences dissipate in them. He said: «I first visited the open mic to share a poem I like. I was excited to get on stage.» He noted that after a few visits to the open mic, he felt a certain difference and noted that: «After a while, my motivation took a different shape, I was also driven to enjoy the supportive environment that brings together the audience and the side conversations that happen. Through which, religion, money or even gender differences dissipated and left room for interesting dialogues between audience members.»

Farah Aridi, 31, writer, researcher and PhD candidate in Arab Literature and Spatial Theory at Goldsmiths University, commented on Beirut's common spaces: «Over the past ten years, Beirut has been steadily reclaiming a space that is now becoming proudly transgressive and assertive, starting from hoisting soapboxes on street corners to throwing full-fledged events in pubs, theatres and cultural centers.» She noted its collective and inclusive aspect and said: «Such a space gathers professionals and amateurs; it is a space through which many have grown and continue to do so; it is a safe space where 'different' or 'othered' voices can be heard.» Farah has performed poetry in Beirut and London throughout the past seven years, and her recent move back to Beirut allowed her to really note the change that has taken place in such common spaces. She added, «This space engendered a milieu through which many could feel involved. Personally, I consider this appropriated socio-spatial entity to be a platform to reclaim a right to difference, a right to voice and participation and a right to the city.» She shared her personal experience with such spaces, saying: «Also, on a personal level, since different people inscribe different meaning and value onto things, it is through such a space that I met my politicized self, through this space's ability to bring together narratives of the individualistic and the collective. It is beautiful and empowering to watch and it is a pleasure to be part of.»

Indeed, these common spaces become places where people can take back what is rightfully theirs: their pain, stories, voices and humanity. Their necessity is highlighted by the increasing number of initiatives around the country and the growing number of people that depend on these spaces. In an increasingly suffocating climate, these common spaces provide a much-needed catharsis, where people can come together and, for a little while, be themselves and own their pain. And in a region which is in dire need of relief, these common spaces are helping deflate this stress bit by bit. They are a breathing space with a force of life that regenerates itself with every individual that partakes in them. They are a dim light in the darkness of pain that engulf our region.

*Poet & Founder of Sidewalk Beirut

The Peace Building in Lebanon news supplement

Issue nº 19, August 2018

Nostalgia

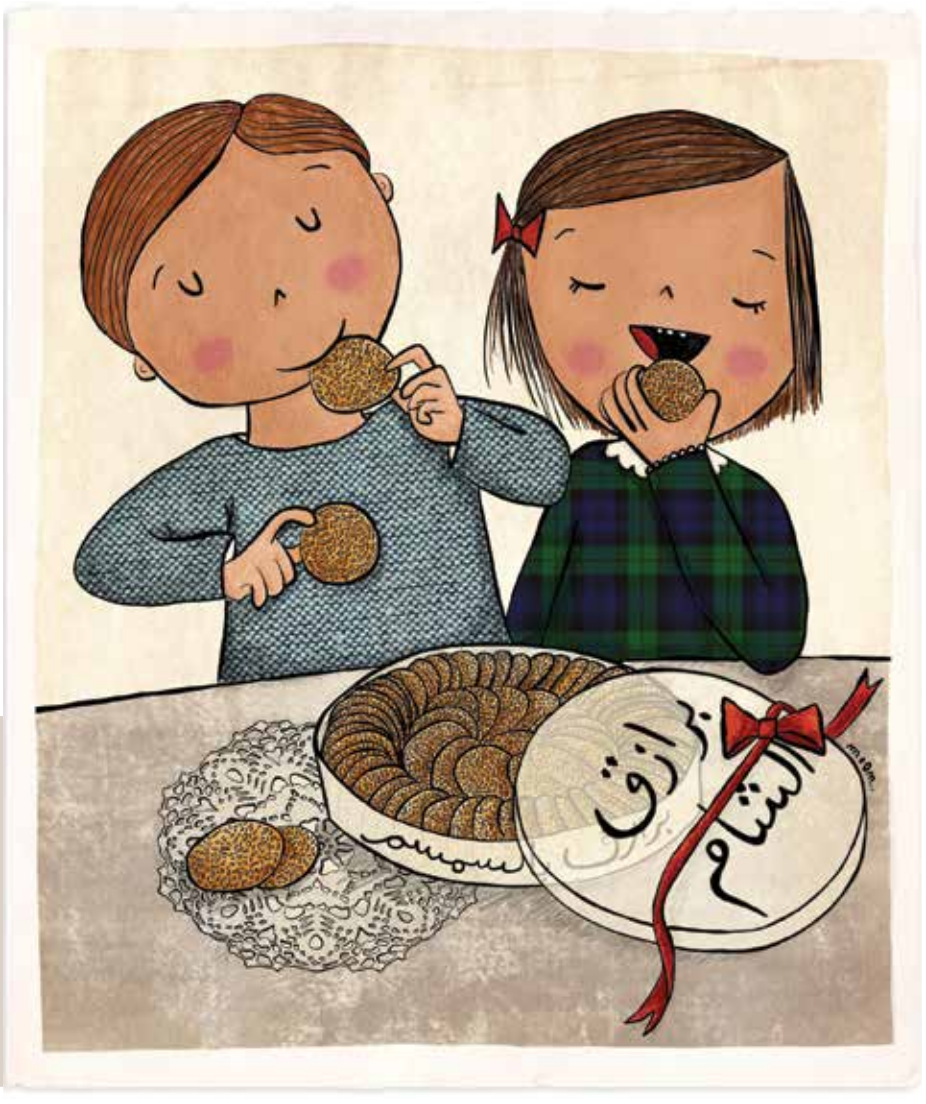
My Story with Barazeq

Marwa Melhem*

There's a passage in the story of Zorba where he talks about strawberries. He says that he was crazy about them as a child and he once ate so much that he got an upset stomach and threw them all up. He tried to do the same thing with women but he failed. That's for Zorba. As for me, I did almost the same thing as a child but not with strawberries.

Whenever I was asked, what should I get you, I would immediately and without giving it a thought say, *barazeq* cookies. It is likely that most of the neighborhood's children shared our obsession with them. When my father would return from the market carrying a box of *barazeq* cookies, we would experience the greatest joy of our lives. Fortunately for us, it was the custom for people to bring sweets during family visits, especially *barazeq* cookies. This was perhaps because of their modest price in comparison with other sweets and the round plastic box that they came in that made it possible to tie a red ribbon around and offer it as a present. We would then hop around the box like bunnies, pulling out the sesame-covered small discs one at a time. Sometimes we would ask the neighbors' children over to the great feast and whisper to them, «Would you like to come over? We have *barazeq*.» Though we used to call them «*baraze'*» and only found out their real name when we saw it written on a shelf in a sweets shop. This was a turning point in our love story with them. It was then that they became a formal food item with the solemn Arabic letter *qaf* at the end of it, despite being colloquially replaced with a glottal stop. We would sometimes sneak during the night to steal two discs from the awe-inspiring box and go back to sleep.

However, unlike Zorba, we never threw them up, even though we ate enormous quantities. I sometimes think that if we were to arrange all the *barazeq* cookies that we had eaten on the ground, they would form a route from our village in the mountains to Beirut. Every memory of every feast and every family gathering is marked with the boxes of these cookies exchanged between households and placed neatly on the tables. There was also the plate that my aunt constantly refilled every time a visitor dropped by or left. Perhaps, one of the symbols that is most shared by our relatives in Syria and those in Beirut were these fragrant friable and brittle cookies with pistachios in the dough. As soon as I mention their name, their aroma and scenes of their presence in homes at all occasions come flooding back. There's so much to say about the aroma of *barazeq*. It was surely much stronger during those olden days than it is today. When a box came into a house, its aroma wafted towards the bedrooms. Since visitors would often come over at night, we would wake up in the mornings tracking their scent, to find the box placed on the long wooden cabinet between display decorative items and porcelain.



© Illustration by graphic designer Mona Abi Wardé

In old and new neighborhoods, there were bakeries spreading the aroma of pastries baked with ghee or butter mixed with spices. But the aroma of the *barazeq* cookies always had its own character and effect. As soon as you get to the corner of the street, the aroma of them being baked would waft towards you from every direction. You would find at least three young men in each bakery taking turns at mixing semolina with flour, butter, vanilla and yeast, then rolling out the dough in the form of small disks, dipping them in roasted sesame with sugar syrup and pistachios.

Any pastry maker knows that the thinner the dough, the crispier, more friable and more delicious the cookies will be. There's a certain nimbleness required to make *barazeq* cookies, to handle these small disks and make sure that the whole surface is covered with sesame seeds. I remember how my mother, like many other women, tried to make them at home once. But they didn't hold a candle to those available on the market. And her attempt was met with annoyance from her children: «Mom, don't make them again; we can buy them.» Even my grandmother, who was of rural Lebanese origin and who insisted on baking everything with her own hands, did not mind my uncle buying them for her. She was happy to arrange them proudly next to all the milk cookies and *ma'amoul* cookies she would make herself for holidays.

«Won't you get us *barazeq* when you come over» was for long the closing sentence for all our telephone conversations with our relatives in Lebanon. Even today, I still hear in Lebanon the sarcastic quip to those who frequently go to Syria, «He's surely going to get *barazeq*,» as it is the most precious gift not available in Lebanon. It was an industry in which the people of Damascus stood out among all the rest, even surpassing the other Syrian governorates. There were no *barazeq* cookies like those of ash-Sham, as Damascus is known colloquially, perhaps that was why the Damascus discs were made slightly larger in size so they would last longer. As time went by, the *barazeq* cookies crossed the border between the two countries after the war, and the secret to making them was carried by many of those who moved between Syria and Lebanon during that period. They appeared in Beirut and from there moved to Tripoli and the coastal countryside. Later, they were available in abundance, with every pastry shop or bakery carrying them.

It is not surprising in our country for a type of sweets to have such a close relationship with people. Maybe we're a warm and emotional people who are very attached to memories. Or maybe it's the large number of wars and crises driving people to finding an outlet in reminiscing about the days of prosperity, family gatherings and holidays, those affectionate days when we were children running between pottery and straw in attics redolent of wheat and spices, standing at a loss before all the types of sweets. It is no surprise that one of us would pick up a *barazeq* cookie today and recount for an hour, memories and impressions, taking a walk down memory lane.

Today, sweets shops are everywhere, the craft is passed on to children by parents and grandparents, and the making of *barazeq* is no secret to anyone. The recipes are all over the internet, from ass-Sham and Aleppo *barazeqs* to Jerusalem *barazeq* cookies that look like flatbread and are part of the heritage and memory of the people of that city. But the magic lies in the nimbleness of the hands that make them, their care in handling the dough, the minutes it takes to bake them, how golden they are, the color of the blond sesame seeds, as well as how sweet and friable they are.

Syria and Lebanon share a lot of common intimate details, with the *barazeq* cookies coming at the top of the list, with those plastic boxes that crossed the border and never came back, and were widely present at every occasion, gathering, dessert course and congratulations visits. In my mind, that wooden table with the thin sheet of glass under which my grandmother would arrange different bills as decoration, with plates of sweets on top, the plate with the *barazeq* was always the quickest to be wiped out.

**Writer*

Art

The Curse and Blessing of Living in a Refugee Camp

Muhammad Mansour*

The trip to the Ketermaya refugee camp, sandwiched between mountains in Chouf District was not an easy ride. To get to the destination, one is bound to get lost several times on serpentine, rough mountain roads. Passing by a brick factory was the landmark I needed to know that I had finally arrived at the isolated and disadvantaged camp accommodating around 61 Syrian families. Getting lost had given me a better sense of the extent to which the camp goes unnoticed.

The putrid smells from over ground sewage, and the overpopulated makeshift tents brought to my mind the Argentinean novelist Ariel Dorfman, who has lived his entire life in exile, who once said, «I think to be in exile is a curse, and you need to turn it into a blessing. You've been thrown into exile to die, really, to silence you so that your voice cannot come home. And so my whole life has been dedicated to saying, 'I will not be silenced'.»

The scene inside the camp reveals the tragedy of each family there and the scars left by the war in Syria in each member: family loss, trauma and exile, experiences that would leave anyone desperate and demoralized. Yet, the children born and raised in Ketermaya have been spared these feelings, as they are unfamiliar with the war. The kids here can be compared to the scene of the camp from a far, where the physical sense of the camp itself diminishes to become a tiny spot surrounded with massive mountains of pine and wild flowers growing on their cliffs. Both children growing up in the camp and wild flowers symbolize the resilience and love of life.

© Photo by Muhammad Mansour

Collage Art and Recycling Culture

Afya Rizq, a 38-year-old Syrian collage artist based in As-Suwayda city in Syria, has come to the camp to enhance the capacities of the children by connecting them to her unwavering conviction of «the door» behind every demolished house and «the light», even a slim one, penetrating the darkness. These themes are represented in dozens of her collage artworks on display in Beirut.

Capitalizing on children aged between 4 and 8, Afya has been encouraging them «not to be silent» and instead express themselves, making use of what may seem ugly or go unnoticed inside the camp.

Inside four-meter square classes silver-walled to reflect the sun light, around 17 kids have been asked to portray their beautiful faces or faces they would like to be. After drawing a sketch, they have been tasked with going around the camp to collect bottle tops, cardboard, cloth pieces and any other type of trash that can be used for recycling. At this point, kids begin to construct the items in their portraits after adding their favorite colors to match their works.

The ultimate goal is to channel any potential existing hate and revenge, which are usually incubated in such inhumane circumstances, into an alternative, self-created world where the power of imagination can really make a change. «Rather than complaining about the situation, a real change begins when we indeed care about our place,» Afya said. «It is essential for children at this age to express their feelings, memories and even ongoing plight in the form of an artwork, this is one of the avenues of much-needed self-expression,» she added.

Afya, who has come to Beirut to display her collage artwork, has never forgotten her dedication and love for children. Beginning in 2005, she has used art to heal and motivate children inside resettlement camps around her Syrian village that has been relatively untouched by the war. At one of her galleries here, she had come across a New York-based humanitarian group who offered her to join as a volunteer. Without any hesitation, Afya decided to accompany the group. Even after they had left, she stayed, in an attempt to make a difference with the children by turning «the curse» of deprivation and marginalization into a «blessing» in the sense of planting the seeds of beauty and positivity among them. In other words, she was changing their perspective on life and enhancing their capacities to «transform the surrounding ugliness into beauty».

«Every child is an artist; my role is just to use their perception of the place around them and show them the beauty inside what is considered ugly,» Afya said.

The Growing Birth Rate as Resilience

Resilience is also reflected in the remarkably growing birth rate at the camp, growing despite amidst all the poverty and deprivation. Each mother I have met at the camp has a family of between four and eight children, almost half of them were born inside the 4,000-meter square camp owned by Ali Taqesh, a donor from the Chouf District south of Beirut.

The influx of Syrian refugees to the camp started with a shelter accommodating one family fleeing the war in 2012. It took only seven months for another 75 shelters to be built to accommodate another 35 families from Syria. Now, the number has doubled and so has the number of members in each family. This is a silent message that no matter the situation, the fundamental human right of giving birth and reproduction is a clear-cut blessing, given that children represent the future and despite all circumstances, they are able to reshape this future in a way that older generations have failed.

A single meeting with a child in the camp was enough to give an idea of what the future would look like. Thirteen-year-old Baraa Antar has never used an iPad or video games – she does not have a cell phone. The only time she got to see life in a city was when she went on a school trip to Beirut, as part of Salaam event where music was performed at the American Lebanese University. «I was afraid and could not leave my parents out of fear,» she said.

Her fear is justifiable, it is similar to birds who get scared from car honks and the fast-paced life, even the movement of the shadow on the wall is enough to make them fly. People in the civilized world got used to this fast rhythm of life until their fear vanished and was replaced with indifference, selfishness and greed. Then people forgot who they really were.

At the camp, Baraa perceives the outside world based on her interactions with a New York-based kid of her age named Logan. Her pen pal sent her a letter describing his life in New York. A life she has never seen but only imagined. This imagination has been motivated her enough and now she daydreams about traveling to America to receive a better education.

Asking how she sees herself in the future, she says, in a confident, eloquent and passionate voice, that she wants to be a lawyer. «I want to achieve justice in the world, beginning with my family members,» she said hopeful, with tears in her eyes.

* Journalist with a specialty in Middle Eastern affairs

Lina Ghaibeh, Comics and Animation Artist

german cooperation
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Implemented by: KFW

UNDP
Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

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.

For more information:
The UNDP «Peace Building in Lebanon» Project
Arab Bank Building, 6th floor, Riad El Solh Street,
Nejmeh, Beirut - Lebanon
Telephone: 01- 980 583 or 70-119160
UNDP Lebanon
#PeaceBuildinginLebanon
www.lb.undp.org/PBSupplement

Designed by:
Omar Harkous
Hassan Youssef

Translated & Edited by:
Layal Mroue